

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 912

CS 205 551

AUTHOR Arnold, Roslyn, Ed.
 TITLE Approaches to Drama in the School.
 INSTITUTION English Teacher's Association of New South Wales, Ashfield (Australia).
 PUB DATE 79
 NOTE 67p.
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Acting; *Creative Dramatics; *Drama; Listening Comprehension; Listening Skills; Literature Appreciation; *Oral Interpretation; Oral Reading; Readers Theater; Secondary Education; Student Motivation; Teaching Methods; Theater Arts
 IDENTIFIERS *Improvisation

ABSTRACT

The eight articles in this booklet suggest activities designed to help students see drama as an active, engaging pursuit. The first article uses excerpts from Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker" to illustrate how improvisation can be used to help students discover meaning in a play. The second and third articles provide suggestions for lessons based on "Romeo and Juliet" and on "King Lear." The fourth article offers suggestions on producing and directing a full-scale school production of a major work such as a three-act play, an operetta, or a musical play. The fifth article provides creative teaching strategies for the study of drama texts and includes ideas for pairs, small groups, large groups, and readers' theatre activities. The sixth article offers a strategy for using various modes of improvisation to help students understand the theme of "Everyman," and the seventh article presents 12 exercises that are valuable in helping students develop an appreciation of drama or other literature. The final article discusses readers' theatre as a method of teaching literature. (FL)

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Approaches to Drama in the School

edited by
Roslyn Arnold

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ENGLISH TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF
NEW SOUTH WALES
96 Chandos Street, Ashfield, N.S.W. 2131

1979

CS 205551

Cover photographs by Karryn Karrys of Australian Centre for Photography Workshop, Paddington, N.S.W.

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Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a book.

National Library of Australia card number and ISBN 0 909955 30 1

Printed by Bridge Printery Pty. Ltd., Sydney.

Approaches to Drama in the School

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Editor's Note

Drama in schools, particularly in Senior Classes with script work, still presents many problems for teachers. The emphasis in these articles is on ways of helping pupils to lift the words of the script off the page and to see drama as an active, engaging pursuit. Appreciation of the literary qualities of a script, be it Shakespeare, Pinter or the work of any dramatist, can arise in relationship to considerations of stage production.

Reading a drama script for the first time can be an extremely difficult reading task. There are a number of suggestions in the following pages which might help pupils to overcome some of the initial reading difficulties.

The Educational Drama Association of New South Wales, with its affiliation with the National Association for Drama in Education offers considerable help to teachers of drama in schools through its publications, conferences and workshops. The Association's address is P.O. Box 522 North Sydney 2060. Current membership fee is \$15.

My thanks to the Nimrod Theatre, Surry Hills for generously allowing me access to their photo files; to Lorraine Phelan of the N.S.W. Speech and Drama Department for her help in the initial stages of this publication; to Gordon Foulds of Wattle Park Teachers' Centre S.A. and to Ron Johnson, Convenor of E.T.A. N.S.W. Publications Committee for his help in the final stages.

Special thanks to Sylvia Enfield, Mandy Enfield, Naomi Enfield and Lucinda Duckett for their help with the cover photographs.

R.A.

Approaching A Play Script through Improvisation: The Caretaker

John Trinder

Sometimes I am struck by the difficulties inherent in teaching "a play" to a group of students who have little or no experience of theatre. The script is not the play. No two productions of a script are the same. In order to elicit the meanings which are in the script it takes professional actors a lengthy rehearsal period. If I am directing a play I have read the play several times before the rehearsals begin. In spite of this my conception of its meanings is greatly modified by the rehearsal process which is in fact a group search for meaning.

One of the principle difficulties is understanding what is meant by "action". A student who reads a play as he might read a novel, tends to think that the action is explicitly in the words the characters speak. An actor attempts to find in the subtext the real meaning underlying these words. Similarly the student tends to think that all that happens is either described in stage directions or in the words which are written down. In Pinter's *The Caretaker* the stage directions for the opening of the play describe the sequence of activities engaged in by Mick before Aston and Davies enter. The director (and reader) are given plenty of help for the actions of the two actors when they enter the room. They are not sufficiently inclusive, however, for the actors to perform adequately without considerable imaginative work on their part. The directions say "Davies looks about the room" but they do not say *why* he looks about the room. The actor (and the reader) must supply this for himself. He must supplement the cues given by the dialogue in order to formulate the underlying motivation for the action. In a production of *The Caretaker* a few years ago I found it useful to suggest to the actor playing Davies that he should move about the room as if he was "casing the joint", seeing what was worth "half-inching". He says later on, "You got a good bit of stuff here". The actor has to look for *immediate meanings* rather than the underlying symbolism. I think this comes later. Pinter himself shows a certain impatience when asked about the deeper meanings of his plays. This is certainly not to deny the existence of these messages but the fascination of the play lies in what actually happens on stage and the way the characters communicate (or fail to communicate) in the pauses and apparent non-sequiturs of the dialogue. As always in Pinter there is the threat of violence beneath the most comic moments. In the beginning of Act Two Mick plays with Davies like a cat playing with a mouse. We know from the directions that Mick is seated whereas Davies is crouched on the floor. We found that the taunting alternation between threat and apparently inconsequential "chat" is heightened by Mick's planting his chair across the legs of the recumbent Davies and as Davies retreats diagonally across the acting space Mick relentlessly keeps pace with him. In order for the script to become a play the director and the actors have to find the appropriate physical action which is the play's meaning as much as the words spoken. They use the rehearsal process to solve the problems of finding the way of speaking the lines together with finding the actions which give meaning both to the actual words and to the sub-textual meanings which underlie these words. It is a useful exercise with students to show them how you can make the same words convey several meanings. It is possible to say the words "I like you!" mean exactly the opposite by the movement and facial expression with which they are spoken.

I find it difficult to accept the high flights of fancy with which some interpreters of *The Caretaker* treat some of the physical objects and references in the text. As a Londoner I find all its "minutiae" completely believable. For example, the references to Sidcup and Davies' papers remind me that the Footscray London Transport Garage is at the end of several bus routes and close by is the Kolster-Brandes factory which housed a branch of the Army Pay Office during the Second World War. A soldier's paybook is his record of service and an

important evidence of his identity. Most of Pinter's imagery is rooted in the life of the metropolis. In a recent production of the play in Adelaide the director lectured the school children who formed a large part of his audience on the significance of the Buddha. He based his whole interpretation of the play on this hand property, perceiving Aston as a Christ figure and the breaking of the statuette as Mick's rejection of religion. All this was prompted by Davies' first confrontation of the Buddha on the gas stove. The preoccupations of the play are surely much more down to earth. They are concerned with the facts of life of this sub-world which include possible gas leaks, draughts, leaking roofs, boots and the odds and ends that will in some distant future "come in handy". It concerns the fears and resentments of the Davies of this world for the alien people with darker skins who have moved into so many "next doors". The central image of *The Caretaker* is that room which is our refuge from so many of those threats in an urban society and which is itself threatened by an interloper. The significance of the Buddha is that it is typical of those useless treasures with which Aston has lined his nest. There are some "resonances" for Davies in that it is possibly connected with "them blacks" and for Mick in that it would be as inappropriate as a garden gnome for the "Ideal Homes" fantasy which is the burden of one of his long speeches in Act Two.

The best way to understand a play is to see it performed. An even better way to fully understand it is to take part in a production and I suppose a stage further is achieved by directing a production. When I say "fully" I do not mean that the participants magically understand all the play's meanings but after working in a production they do know a lot more than is possible from a silent or class reading. It is very common for actors to use the techniques of improvisation in order to solve the problems of understanding the motivations of the characters they are playing. This has led many drama teachers to use improvisation as a means of helping a class to gain an understanding of a text.

When I started this paper I had intended that I would centre it on the use of improvisation to help students come to grips with *Waiting for Godot*. Last term a group of fourth year drama majors at Sturt C.A.E. joined me in devising a number of workshops in which we worked with high school matriculation classes. We came across a snag. We found it difficult to improvise with Beckett's characters in this way. Whereas with *The Caretaker* and Miller's *The Crucible* we could improvise on the situations in the play this is not appropriate for many absurdist non-naturalistic texts or comedies which depend largely upon language. Improvising in order to investigate motivation and character only works with a play where there is a degree of psychological realism. The characters of *The Caretaker* and *The Crucible* have a life before the period covered by the plays itself. *Waiting for Godot* doesn't work that way.

What we did find was that we could use improvisation to explore the techniques required in order to stage *Waiting for Godot*. We could help the class to understand what was meant by a critic who referred to the "music hall" style which must be employed by the actors. The students, in pairs, worked out

comedy routines involving first a hat and then a pair of boots. They experimented with comedy routines which moved from slapstick to pathos. They worked out joke routines as if they were comedian and "straight man" starting off with the time honoured "I say, I say . . . ?" using such archaic two-liners as "Who was that lady I saw you with last night?" or "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Most importantly the class was helped to understand the difference between naturalistic and non-naturalistic forms of presentation.

I think it advisable, however, to use *The Caretaker* rather than *Waiting for Godot* as my example to show how improvisation can be used to help a class to discover meaning. The following notes describe some topics which could be used to investigate both Pinter's style and his preoccupations. They make reference to incidents in his first play, *The Room*, to *The Birthday Party*, to the revue sketches in the edition which includes *A Slight Ache* as well as to *The Caretaker*. I must stress that their purpose is exploration rather than performance. It is important that the teacher convinces the students that he is concerned not with how proficiently they act but with the discussion these attempts provoke. It is important that the teacher's comments avoid value judgements about the acting but develop the class' confidence and concentration when they work in this kind of activity. I find it valuable to preface the work on the improvisations which deal specifically with the situations in the plays by examining such generalisations as "comedy of menace". First it is necessary to think about comedy. What makes us laugh? First we could take the simplest, classic example of a comic happening—a man slips on a banana skin. The laughter that results from this mishap is directly in proportion to the pomposity of "he who slips". If someone with whom we sympathise falls we do not laugh but we are sympathetic. This phenomenon can be investigated "actively" by improvising. We can also explore how what seems at first a comic situation turns into a threat. How what appears at first a game becomes an attack. Instances which arise in the students' own lives such as the teasing which is in fact disguised bullying, can inform their understanding of the scene with the bag after Aston's return in Act Two. By means of improvisation we can connect the meanings of the play with the concerns and experiences of our own life.

THE CARETAKER—an approach through Improvisation.

The following improvisation topics do not attempt to reproduce the sequences of action in the play but provide opportunities for exploring the themes and motivation of the characters. They aim at providing "points of contact" which may illuminate a later reading of the play. It is not expected that classes would work through all the examples but teachers can select those which would illustrate points they wish to make.

The suggested approach is as follows:

- (a) The teacher explains the situation—he gives "the given circumstances". The class are encouraged to ask questions to elicit the facts needed in order to play out the scene.
- (b) The class, in pairs or threes, try out the scene. It is sometimes helpful to

have one of the group act as director but only after the class are experienced at this kind of work.

- (c) The teacher chooses one group to show their improvisation. There are differences of opinion about both the value and effect of "showing" but in this case it is necessary in order to pinpoint the last stage in which the class discusses the implications of what they are doing.
- (d) The "outcome". The teacher leads the discussion by asking pertinent questions which help the class to objectively examine behaviour rather than make facile value judgements about the skill of the performers. "How did you know what he was thinking?" "What gave away the agitation he was feeling?" "What was he really saying?" "How did he show what he was really after?"

The success of this kind of activity is gauged by the liveliness of the discussion after the "investigation" and by the degree of participation by the majority of class members.

The improvisations investigate some typical concerns of Pinter's plays and are not restricted to *The Caretaker*.

GROUP A

- (a) "Some people find it hard to say 'thank you':"

In pairs One of you has taken pity on another older man who is down on his luck. They meet in a cheap cafe where the older man has just got the sack. The younger takes him home to his one-room flat and asks him to sit down, offers him a cigarette, or a cup of tea, some boots and some money, but although the old man wants to take the gifts he finds it hard to be grateful and accepts them grudgingly.

- (b) "You got a good bit of stuff here!"

In pairs With the same characters as (a).

The younger man has filled his room with a collection of objects which might come in useful later on. He likes fiddling with things although he is not very good at it. The older man looks around the room while the other is fiddling with a piece of apparatus he is trying to mend. They don't talk much although the older man occasionally asks a question. Maybe the older man is looking for articles he can "borrow". Try this scene out showing how the older man is "feeling his way" into the younger man's confidence.

- (c) "I like . . . working with my hands"

In pairs The younger man, who is a "do it yourself" enthusiast but who never manages to finish anything, tells the other about some of the projects he hopes to complete. The other, in order to get in his "good books", suggests ways in which he could be useful. See how many jobs that you could invent which would be likely to be needed around a neglected house.



GROUP B

(d) *"What about this gas stove?"*

In pairs The older man is making his bed up when he notices an old gas stove near the head of the bed. It is not connected but it seems dangerous to him as it might be connected. He goes on with what he is doing but he keeps on being distracted by it and returns to investigate it. When the other man returns he tries to persuade him to swap beds, making some excuses such as fear of draughts. Experiment with "meaningful silences" as well as with words. Show how the old man does not get directly to the point but works up to it whilst the younger man, possibly quite purposely, fails to see what he is getting at.

(e) *"Give us it, that's my bag!"*

In threes Try and show how what apparently is a teasing game can be full of menace. The old man is trying to get back his bag from one of the younger men who keeps it just out of reach. The other younger man alternately helps him to regain it or gives it to the other younger man so that the older doesn't know where he stands. Try out the scene so that it looks more like a ritual than an actual game with the older man becoming more and more exasperated and bewildered.

(f) *"The Inquisition"*

In fours One of you is being interrogated by the other three who surround you. They ask you apparently simple questions—"did you sleep well?", "where do you live" but never give you time to answer. Sometimes the questioners say nothing but gradually move their chairs closer. Sometimes they all ask questions at once. After a few minutes the victim collapses on to the floor completely overcome. The effect can be heightened by the questioners alternating between being threatening and apparently kindly.

GROUP C

(g) *This is my room—"I'm in charge".*

In groups of five One of you has a room flat in an old house. The others in turn visit you giving various excuses such as wanting to read the meter, inspect the plumbing under the sink, or the state of the floors. The first is terrified that he may be evicted but tries not to show it. The visitors are very mysterious, looking at things other than they say they have come to inspect. Gradually the tension builds up until after the last visitor has gone. The tenant or owner collapses into a chair convinced that he is going to lose the room. Show him alternately cajoling or threatening the visitors, but they maintain an official politeness not really answering any of his questions, but asking him further questions instead.

(h) *The loneliness of "bed sitters".*

In threes It is the early hours of the morning in an all night cafe in the city. One

by one, two lonely people come in and order a cup of tea which they try and make last as long as possible. They are conscious of the disapproving eye of the proprietor who resents them using the cafe and spending so little money. The proprietor finally asks them to leave. The two people are desperate for company and a place where they can see other people and enjoy light and warmth.

GROUP D

(i) "I thought people started being funny"

In fives or sixes In a cafe a desperately lonely man tries to start a conversation with others who are there. They are, one after another, embarrassed and move away from him. In his efforts to interest them the lonely man tells them about strange things that happen to him at work but they don't want to listen to him. Finally, he is left alone at the table trying to hear what they are saying about him, while they, meeting together at the cash desk whisper about him to the proprietor who finally orders him out.

GROUP E

(j) "He's got all my papers down there"

In pairs Think of a situation in which someone needs to prove his identity—such as buying an article in a shop or on account or when stopped by a policeman in the street who suspects that you are in possession of stolen goods. Show the old man from the previous scenes attempting to prove his identity without any evidence to back up his story.

In pairs (k) An out-of-work man who has used various assumed names in his attempts to avoid the collection of debts or payment of alimony or for any other reason you can invent, applies for the job as caretaker of an old house divided into flats.

In pairs (l) A man who in most people's eyes is a total failure, and who has never been able to keep down the most menial job for more than a fortnight, explains to a friend why he found an odd-job man's tasks beneath him. He also finds it very difficult to accept anyone telling him what to do.

The improvisations do not reproduce the actual scenes or characters of the play but suggest parallels which could inform discussion.

In all these situations stress that people communicate as much by what they don't say as by the things they speak. Impress upon the class the importance of objects and people's relationship with their treasured possessions, and what these treasures say about them. The improvisations attempt to bring out a sense of the fears we have of threats to our security.

The information about each improvisation could be duplicated on cards which the groups or pairs are given. It is important, however, that there should be discussion before the scenes are attempted.

After reading the play, pairs could then attempt to act out short scenes using the script. These could include:

- (1) Act One (bottom of p. 10, bottom of p. 11) from
Davies *Anyway, I'm obliged to you, letting me . . . to*
Davies *Always have been.*

—stress the fact that the words are only part of the action. Let the class discuss what the two characters are doing. What are they *not* saying. What is Davies up to? Does Aston know what he is getting at? Would they trust Davies? Is he honest?

- (2) Act One (p. 26 to top p. 24) from
Aston *See this plug . . . to*
Davies . . . *See they're switched off. You leave it to me.*

Ask the actor to show both Davies' fear of mechanical appliances and how he tries to hide it and to try out how it works with Aston not seeing Davies' reluctance to use the electric fire.

- (3) Act One (p. 27 to p. 29) from
Aston's exit *to*
Mick—*What's the game?*

Work out carefully the series of actions described very explicitly in the stage directions.

- (4) Act Two (Top of p. 37 to top of p. 38)
From the stage direction *Silence. A drip sounds in the bucket. They all look up. to*
Aston: (to Davies) *I got your bag.*

Davies is watching the other two from a safe distance. The others talk calmly and dispassionately, seemingly not taking any notice of him.

- (5) Act Two (p. 48 to p. 50)
From Mick *He doesn't like work to*
Mick . . . *Cut it!*

Bring out the change of mood so that at first Davies is encouraged by Mick to think he is on his side but then Davies realises he has said the wrong thing.

The class may find it difficult to act convincingly when they are kept to the text as this requires sophisticated acting ability. It is possible that after trying with the text they then try putting across the gist of the scene by improvising. This can enliven future readings. Always stress the need to discover what is happening rather than simply speaking the words. Alternating between reading the text and improvising in their own words can often show the class members the subtle craft of the playwright's use of dialogue. The students should now be encouraged to find answers to their questions in the text. They will inevitably then also find that Pinter does not give all the necessary information so that this must be "invented" by the director and actors.

It might be interesting to experiment with Mick's long speech on pp. 35, 36 with two or three of the most able readers providing the sound track of the spoken words of the speech while two actors mime the "cat and mouse" business with the trousers between Mick and Davies.

The surface meaning of the speech is not so important as its inappropriateness and the context of Davies who is quite bewildered by it. To him it is a torrent of words of which he can make little sense. Mick takes "teasing" almost to the level of "torture" when he accompanies the verbal bludgeoning with the provocation of holding Davies' trousers in and out of his reach with obvious physical threat.

One difficulty with *The Caretaker* is its intimate connection with its English setting. It is difficult for an Australian audience to catch every detail of its text. Who would remember Sidcup's connection with the Army pay office headquarters and its remoteness at the end of a suburban bus route? What is important is its significance as a talisman to Davies, an almost magic place which can offer proof of his identity. By "playing out" similar situations the students can be led to an appreciation of the little world of Aston's room which is his refuge from the threatening world outside and the denser layer of meaning underneath Pinter's apparently prosaic but evocative text as it reveals the struggle for possession.

The page references are to the Methuen Modern Plays edition of *The Caretaker*.

Romeo and Juliet *in the* Classroom

David Mallick

A. K. Hudson in *Shakespeare and the Classroom* gives the following as a representative lesson on Shakespeare:

TEACHER: Jones, have you read lately?

JONES: No, sir.

TEACHER: Read this speech on page 45, then. It begins at *To be or not to be*. It's a soliloquy. What does "soliloquy" mean, by the way, before we start?

JONES: A speech made by one person, sir, when nobody else is supposed to be listening.

TEACHER: Nobody else? What about us? What about the audience?

JONES: Oh, yes sir, the audience of course, sir.

TEACHER: All right, start reading then.

JONES: *To be, or not to be—that is the question—*

TEACHER: What's the question? What does Hamlet mean?

JONES: Sir, he's wondering if he ought to do himself in or not, sir.

TEACHER: Do himself in? Do himself in? Do the rest of you boys understand what this horrible phrase means?

CLASS: Yes, sir.

TEACHER: All right, Jones, some of them understand. You can go on.

JONES: *Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of trouble
And by opposing end them.*

TEACHER: Right, stop there for a moment, Jones. Half the class is asleep. Everybody open their exercise books. Ten minutes to write out a paraphrase of those first five lines that Jones has just read.

The book was written in 1954 and Hudson writes that "the method certainly is antiquated and inhuman and sterile and many things besides, but we know from our own experience that it nevertheless survives neat in many schools, and only slightly diluted in many more. It is fortunately falling into disrepute." I am not sure that it has fallen into disrepute. It is reasonable to think that much drama work on scripts has the class chained to their desks, reading around the class, writing paraphrases, character sketches, essays, etc. It is also reasonable to comment that a great number of young people have a profound contempt for Shakespeare. We have to honestly ask whether our methods of using his plays have contributed to this contempt.

Hudson argues that our work must be stage centred with problems of interpretation being worked on in class workshops. The following is an account of a number of lessons using scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. The methods described here have been used by myself and student teachers. It would be idle to pretend that each lesson was a great success. But it is reasonable to say that each lesson had moments of excitement and vigorous discussion. The classes used on each occasion were classes of mixed ability.

The sequence of lessons was structured around four scenes in the play:

- (a) Juliet alone, in her room, preparing to take the drug. (Act IV Sc. iii 14-58)
- (b) Balthazar delivers the news of her death to Romeo. (Act V Sc. i 1-33)
- (c) Romeo with Juliet's body. (Act V Sc. iii 88-120)
- (d) Juliet with Romeo's body. (Act V Sc. iii 160-168)

[There are of course other highly significant moments that could have been used: that moving scene when Capulet attacks his daughter; the finding of Juliet's body; Romeo fighting Paris in the crypt; Friar Laurence appearing on the scene and so on.]

The section chosen was the final tragedy of the two lovers, scenes which have plenty of physical action, dialogue, narrative and dramatic tension. The story up to then is easy enough to tell and is gripping enough to hold any class.

SCENE 1—JULIET'S "DEATH"

This is too long and complex a speech for the class to read immediately so the teachers gave as sensitive a reading as possible. An important point to make here is that it is not necessary that the class understand everything in the speech. I feel strongly against immediately asking questions on the meaning of lines after

a dramatic speech. If the reading is done well enough much of the speech, even if not fully understood will carry a vague but adequate meaning. Close study of the text we want but only after the real encounter with the drama. How then to move into this encounter?

Reading for Mood

We concentrated on the first 12 lines of the scene (Act IV Sc. iv 14-23)—Jul. Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again . . .

No, no; this shall forbid it; lie thou there.

Each person was asked to mark in the changes of mood in these lines. The marking of mood changes led to some useful discussion of the meaning of the lines. Its main usefulness came though when individuals experimented with reading aloud the lines using their own notes on the mood changes. [The tape recorder could have been used here to encourage more precise discussion of the various readings.] The classes were quick in picking up the mood changes—starting from that final touching "Farewell" which suggests much more than a conventional goodbye, going in a few moments through a confusion of sadness, excitement, fear, doubt, decision—all in a dozen lines.

Movement

The reading from the desks, very useful for these unconfident classes, led into the business of movement and use of properties. Initial discussion is quite easy to get moving—what do we have in Juliet's room? Some useful suggestions can be noted—a photo of Romeo (ours was a modern production), a mirror, a photo of her father, candles, a wedding dress (I found this particularly useful for future use in the scene). And of course there must be the drug and the dagger.

The next thing is to move into action. I am sure there are more ambitious ways of approaching this but feeling certain that much of our drama work is too rushed and not thorough enough in its early stages, I wanted especially with these inexperienced and unconfident children to move slowly. The exercise can be quite simply set—how will Juliet use any 3 or 4 of the properties while in her terrifying situation? Volunteers were asked to step out the movements. One must be prepared for the clichés—throwing father's photo across the floor; clasping Romeo's to the breast, etc.—but these are actions that must be accepted, talked about and built on in full class discussion. There were some interesting moments though—Juliet quieting her fear by gently combing her hair; a long drawn out moment with her folding her wedding dress and gently putting it away.

The aim of the exercise is not to develop a fine small performance but to explore dramatic possibilities. The time to start a fuller performance will come later when the class has built up some confidence and organized a bank of ideas. By then their developing interpretations will be more ready for final tests of dramatic credibility. There is a useful point made by Professor Russell Brown—"The slower and the simpler the work is done, the more various and more revealing will it become. The sooner, too, will individual participants be ready to continue with experimental, theatrical reading for themselves, awaken-

ing slowly and variously a whole play to life in the theatre of their minds, beginning in fantasy to enact and realise more of its roles and scenes, in ever-changing possibilities."

Individual Written Work

- (a) Each student was asked to write his own soliloquy for Juliet's predicament. There are two possible ways of using their writing. They can work in pairs or groups testing out each other's piece. They will probably need some guidelines for their discussion. The following questions can help them:

Do the lines sound as though they are being thought or spoken?

Do the lines seem appropriate to the character and the situation—a noble young girl facing a terrifying situation?

Are there lines which can be changed to give them more dramatic power?

On the other hand the teacher can test some of the pieces. He can read the monologues out aloud and the writer can comment on whether the teacher has succeeded in conveying what he had in mind.

[As I write this I realise both approaches could be profitable—the teacher showing by example the possibilities, and this followed by discussion in pairs or groups.]

- (b) Each student wrote a ground plan for the scene he had written. This plan will show entrances, exits, placement of furniture, levels, stairs and so on. The writers were asked also to show on the plan, by means of arrows, the various movements of Juliet. This was a valuable exercise contributing much to later performance. It was a very popular exercise also, experimenting with arrows, figures, different colours. Lest it be thought it is only a pleasant game it should be remembered that many producers—Stanislavski for example—work in this way.

Class Work

The next lesson was an important one—to get each student to read aloud the small soliloquy he had written. For most of these students it was some achievement just to read these tender lines aloud and so it was important that some strain was taken off them. So each person read his piece while seated. A start had been made even though the readings were anything but dramatic.

The following exercise was useful in encouraging more forceful and sensitive reading. It works on the idea that the meaning and real significance of lines is rarely found only in the lines themselves. It is the undermeaning of the lines we search for. The exercise was to give different undermeanings for the same line. One example would be:

Don't go [What are the possibilities?]

Don't go [I command you to stay]

Don't go [Please stay if you care anything for me]

Don't go [It's not safe for you to go out now]
Don't go [I warn you you'll be sorry if you leave]*

The class can then work on other examples:

What is the matter?

He's been gone 20 minutes

No!

Lines from their own writing can then be tested.

SCENE 2—BALTHAZAR AND ROMEO

Class Work

The story up to this scene was quickly told. Balthazar believes Juliet is dead and reports the news to Romeo. The teacher has a choice here—read Shakespeare's scene first or let them improvise their own scene. We chose the latter. The procedure was as follows:

- (a) Seated at their desks in pairs the class experiments with the breaking of the news.
- (b) One or more of the pairs then tries their dialogue out with entrances and movements. Of course the first efforts will be tentative and clumsy but on each occasion there were raised two drama problems which were fruitfully worked on.

(i) *Control of Movement*

As so often with students inexperienced in this kind of work the class discussion of performance fell back on unhelpful comment on acting ability—"he's got his back to the audience", "not much life in it", "no expression in it". How can the teacher open up discussion, not of acting, but the contribution of the acting to the drama? Questions on following lines are concrete and problematical—How does Balthazar enter with his terrible news? What is his manner? How does he greet Romeo? What is Romeo doing before Balthazar enters, remembering his great happiness at the thought of being reunited with Juliet? How does Romeo react to the news?

For example, some time was spent on experimenting with the following sequence, a sequence that developed out of class contributions, Balthazar watches Romeo from a distance, with Romeo joyfully talking of his love for Juliet; Romeo notices him and he moves forward quickly to kneel before him; Romeo blurts out his questions, slowly becoming conscious of Balthazar's stillness; Balthazar moves away and answers in his grief. Such a sequence is simple enough but a considerable amount of discussion, experimenting and interpretation went on in developing it.

- (ii) When asked to improvise the scene most students seem to expect that the only kind of response lies in passionate grief and much breast

* I refer the reader to the excellent chapter in C. McCaw: *Acting is Believing* (Holt Rinehart and Winston) for discussion and further examples of this activity.

thumping. Working on the Shakespearean scene can introduce them to the powerful restraint of really tragic lines. The improvisation work had helped them to be prepared for the Shakespearean lines and so we can concentrate on Romeo ecstatically wanting the news of Juliet; the warm greeting of Balthazar; the breathless questioning for news, the sudden faltering as he senses tragedy.

Balthazar's sadness and silence are the physical signs of the news that he brings. It is Balthazar's turn to become agitated and now Romeo falls still. And then there is that remarkable and moving restraint as he receives the news. In his grief he is controlled and practical, "though know'st my lodging, get me ink and paper, and hire post-horses, I will hence to-night" and then that last fine caring line, "Tush thou art deceived", a gentle smiling reproof.

Work in Pairs: There are two possibilities:

- (i) memorising the short Shakespearean scene
- (ii) writing and polishing of their own dialogue between Balthazar and Romeo.

SCENE 3—DEATHS OF ROMEO AND JULIET

Class Work

We reversed the procedure of the previous scene and read Shakespeare's version before moving into our improvised work. Here the teachers read the soliloquies and once again it was found that with a reasonably sensitive reading it was not necessary to question on the meaning of particular lines. A useful exercise on the third reading of the speeches was for the teacher to suggest that when the class thought there would be some significant movement, change of pace, change of mood, they put their hands up. The teacher would stop and consider the proposal. There are two or three readings that are necessarily quite chaotic but if the teacher has his wits about him on the third reading he should be able to "put together" a reasonable version based on the students' proposals. It is quite a slow business and an exacting one but the teachers found that there was extra enthusiasm as a class found itself guiding the teacher as he experimented with the scene.

Group Work

Groups worked on their own scenes of the two deaths. Each teacher reported that there was considerable improvement in discipline of the groups and quality of the discussion. It is reasonable to assume that the work in the previous lessons had contributed to their growing confidence and knowledge.

Some time was spent with groups experimenting with their preliminary versions. In one of the classes several useful ideas were thrown up for discussion. Juliet takes Romeo's cape and gently puts it over his face. But then how does she get the cape from the dead body? He took it off as he came in was a suggestion. But would he in such a situation? If so why would he? And then the last tender moment—she gently closes his eyes with a prayer. But what prayer? We experimented around the class, beginning with some highly melodramatic ones

and finishing with the restrained and moving—"good night, good friend". The actual death moments of Romeo and Juliet need considerable work and were never satisfactorily resolved. Nor were those moments between Juliet's awakening and her recognition of Romeo's body. But the questions on dialogue and stage business led to a considerable amount of involved discussion and experimenting.

Individual Work

The boys in the class wrote their own soliloquies for Romeo and the girls theirs for Juliet.

Performance

The classes were divided into three groups and each group was to give a performance of their improvised play.

The sequence followed was:

- (a) Writing of scripts. There were about 8 or 9 in each group. Each group had to make decisions on the following:
 - (i) choice of producer or producers
 - (ii) choice of 3 actors
 - (iii) method by which each scene was to be written. It should be noted that they had for their use the Shakespearean text which they were encouraged to consult and their own writing from the previous lessons.
- (b) Each group having a tape recording of this script.
- (c) Performance of scripts for the class for discussion and possible revision.

One weakness that became apparent was the sameness of each performance. This was probably because of the very structured class discussion in the preceding lessons. But if one considers the inexperience of the classes in this kind of practical drama it is not such a worry, arguing that with this experience into drama behind them they could later take a more individual line in their work.

- (d) Performances for another class.

Some Approaches to King Lear in the Classroom

Roslyn Arnold

Teaching Shakespeare in the classroom is a daunting task. Where do you start? How do you arouse pupils' interest? What can you reasonably expect them to know about the play in the short time you have available to study it? Will they be able to answer an examination question? Should you play the record of the play right through at the beginning of the unit of work? These are some of the questions teachers ask themselves when facing the task of teaching Shakespeare in a senior classroom. I'll try to provide some answers though I know my ideas may not suit some teachers. Even those who do want to work in the ways I suggest will need to adapt the ideas to their particular classroom situations.

At the end of about 12-15 lessons on a drama text, pupils are expected to be able to write an examination question on the play, and teachers are expected to have met the requirements of the N.S.W. Senior Syllabus:

The study of drama should be directed to the experiencing of the literary and dramatic qualities of the play as a whole . . . (pupils) should be helped to grasp the ways in which our sense of the play is created by the sweep of the action, by juxtaposition of scenes, by imagery and tone, and to recognise the functions a particular scene may have other than merely advancing the plot.

Obviously the Syllabus demands much of teachers and pupils but I think these demands are justified. Anything less than the aims suggested above would ignore the complexities of dramatic art form. Nonetheless, how does one cope with these aims in a real class situation? One thing is essential. Teachers must be prepared to put themselves at risk by allowing pupils to engage in tentative and exploratory activities related to the text. They need to set up situations which demand some understanding of the text from pupils. They must be able to advise, intervene at appropriate times, allow the pupils to make mistakes and find ways to right them themselves—in fact, they need to play a role which may be rather different to their usual teaching role. Pupils must see, do, and be (all active verbs!) if they are to discover what the text means. As teachers we all have our own favourite ideas about Shakespeare (anyone who has marked public examination questions knows that) but in fairness to pupils, shouldn't we let them find out that they can read, interpret, evaluate, respond to and enjoy Shakespeare? Listening to us talking about Shakespeare is unlikely to do that.

Given a middle-range class of Year 11, with sufficient experience of drama to know what is meant by improvisation, and familiar with the discipline needed in co-operative drama and group activities, here is how I might plan 12-15 lessons on *King Lear*. Of course, such unit planning never goes according to plan, but I find it helps pupils if you can give them some idea of the kinds of activities they will be doing, and the expectations you have of their preparation before the lessons.

First, I would think about the kinds of writing activities pupils might be involved in while class work on *King Lear* is progressing. If pupils are to write a fairly substantial critical essay at the end of the unit of work on the play, they must have ample opportunity to write in personal and expressive ways about the play before they attempt the essay. If the play is being studied in Year 11, then I might ask pupils to hand in a folder of written work on the play with pieces chosen from a number of alternatives. Some of those alternatives might be:

- (i) Give an eye-witness account of Act I Sc. i in which you describe the scene and reveal your reactions to the characters' behaviours.
- (ii) Write an imaginary letter from Burgundy to one of his friends in which he explains why he did not marry Cordelia. (Or a letter from France to one of his friends explaining why he did marry Cordelia.)
- (iii) Rewrite the faked letter from Edgar, Act I Sc. ii 47-65 in simple language.
- (iv) Draw up a costume inventory for Lear, Kent, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Indicate what they would wear in each scene and give some explanation for any changes in costume throughout the play.
- (v) Submit a lighting plan for each scene of the play (or key scenes). This could be done with a series of sketches using symbols for different lights, or it could be written as a description of desired effects.
- (vi) Submit an outline of sound effects for key scenes. (I'd feel I had to warn pupils not to drown out the poetic effects of, say, Lear's storm scene or 'mad' scenes with over emphatic sound effects.)

- (vii) Imagine you are directing *King Lear* and you write a letter to an actor/actress asking him/her to take the part of one of the characters in the play. In the letter, explain your interpretation of that character and give some reasons why you want that actor/actress to play the part.

I am not going to make suggestions for the kinds of examination questions pupils might be expected to answer, but I am going to suggest that some time be given to discussing with pupils the meanings of words like "discuss", "evaluate", "estimate", "account for", "implications", "juxtaposition"—in other words, the jargon of examination papers. We cannot assume that pupils have picked up good writing practices incidentally. They need practice in a range of writing tasks and an awareness of the demands of different reading audiences. Often pupils do not know how to incorporate quotations into their writing—or how to select appropriate quotations for their purposes. Some class time needs to be given to this important work.

I stress writing at the beginning of planning a unit of work on drama because I feel we are often disappointed in the quality of pupils' written responses to drama, particularly when they may have responded very favourably to the play in class. Part of the problem could be overcome if we clarified our expectations of their written work from the start and gave them a wide variety of writing tasks. Appropriate reference can then be made to these writing tasks as class work continues.

Some of the writing activities I have suggested may seem too simple for Year 11 pupils but they are actually quite difficult to do well. If they lead the pupil to the text, and give him/her a sense of the text as a guide to dramatic production, then they are well justified.

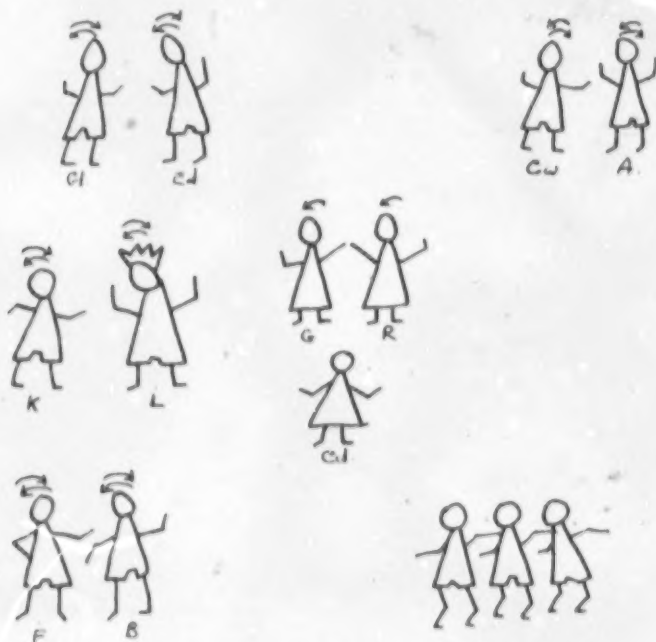
Having decided on a range of writing activities which might be part of the unit of work on *King Lear*, let's look now at the first lesson on the play. Often we tell the pupils to read the text of the play and come to class ready to discuss it at the first lesson. And so often we are frustrated when they do not do it. But honestly, how many of us read a Shakespearean text enthusiastically and with understanding? It is probably one of the hardest reading tasks one can face. If we do recognise this difficulty, then sometimes we fall into the trap of subjecting the pupils to ten lessons of listening passively to a record of the play. I would prefer to leave the record until pupils can listen selectively and critically to particular parts, after they have some familiarity with the play and know what to listen for. Resist too, any impulses you may have to let pupils read around the class when they have no idea what they are reading. I have heard too, of teachers reading the whole play taking every part—but I don't think that happens now, does it?

Let me suggest an introductory method which I think may help pupils to overcome that initial difficulty of getting into the play. It can be used even if pupils have not read the play before coming to the first lesson. Here it is.

You bring to the first lesson several large sheets of butcher paper and felt pens. Divide the class into as many small groups as there are acts in the play, i.e.

five groups for *King Lear*. Allocate one act to each small group. Each small group labels its one large sheet of paper, ACT I or ACT II etc. This large sheet is then divided into blocks corresponding to the number of scenes in the act. Each block is labelled appropriately Sc i, Sc ii, and so on. (You could use one sheet of paper for each scene if you prefer.)

Now refer to the list of characters at the beginning of the play and decide on a uniform code (initial) for each character. A colour can be chosen for each character now, or later when the sheets are re-worked if you prefer. The task now is for each group to draw in each block, stick figures to represent each character in that particular scene. Arrows can be used to indicate that a character comes on to the stage or goes off during the scene. If he/she comes on and goes off during the same scene, it can be symbolised by . A character with no arrows over his/her head is on stage at the beginning and end of that scene.



KING LEAR, Act I Scene I

A further sophistication of this method would be to add symbols to suggest the setting for that scene. For example, trees and clouds for outdoors, windows and furniture for indoors. A code could also be devised to indicate lighting effects for each scene. For example, imagine you had a dimmer light, indicate where it

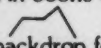
would be turned down low or up high. A partly shaded circle could be the symbol on the sheet of paper. There are many possibilities this method offers for practical interpretations of the play and the sheets can be re-worked as understanding of the play progresses. (Which character would you now position in the centre of the stage in that scene?)

I'd favour letting the groups experiment with the blocking of the scenes until they are satisfied with the result. So you need lots of paper. You may decide it is better to give pupils a scene each to work on, but I do think there is a value in their working together in a group, discussing and deciding as they go.

When the five acts of the play have been worked out in this way, the sheets of paper can be pinned around the classroom wall in correct sequence of acts as a diagrammatic representation of the characters and their movements in the play. It should be easy to see now who comes on when, who appears most often in the play, (is that character necessarily the most important?), who drops out when, (look for the Fool's last entrance in *King Lear*), and which scenes in the play are most/least crowded.

The advantages of this method justify the time it may take, I think. It need not all be done in class time. Pupils can set to work immediately and become familiar with the names of the characters and their movements, at least. They do not have to read the play closely at first to undertake this task. They have a working model of the play for further modification later on. They can share their tentative understanding of the action with their peers, and most importantly, they are encouraged to see a drama script as a "blueprint to action" and drama as a three dimensional experience in which people interact in particular ways.

While this work is progressing, you will probably find that you are filling in some of the story of the play for the class. You will probably find that the pupils ask questions about the characters, particularly the groups working on the later acts of the play.

Another sophistication of this method can be used when the class is familiar with the play. The groups take a piece of paper and try to do an abstract outline of the dramatic/emotional intensity of each act, or scene. I have in mind something like the diagram you used to find in books on drama which traced the movement of the play in outlines like this . Or pupils could draw an abstract design which they might use as a backdrop for a particular scene. Even people who cannot draw can play around with this idea. The point is, this kind of exercise encourages pupils to make individual responses to the play and it taps other symbolic responses than purely verbal ones. Generally it does lead to discussion too.

When the blocking of the play is completed, you will probably have a fair idea from pupils' responses where to go from here. I would be inclined to organise pupils to improvise their act. By that I mean, they read their act and work out a fairly free interpretation of it. They could improvise a situation close to that in one of the scenes, or they could decide to follow very closely the action of a scene.

Comparisons between the pupils' improvised interpretations and what happens in the play are valuable discussion points. The playwright's skill in finishing a scene and moving into the next one, and his skill in revealing characters' motivations and reactions through their dialogue, might become evident to the pupils. Often pupils' improvisations go on and on because they do not know how to finish a scene. How does Shakespeare do it?

Another way to start pupils reading a play is to select key words from the play, for example, in *King Lear*, "love/loved", "mad/madness", "sight/sea/eyes", "nature/unnatural/unnaturalness", "fool/folly", "gods/goddess" and divide the class up into groups giving each group one word set to work on. In their groups the pupils skim the play, or one act, noting *where* their word appears, *who* says it, to *whom*, and *what* the word means in that context. The words I have given appear often enough in Act I of *King Lear* to make the exercise purposeful. What the pupils discover, hopefully, is that these words take on different meanings in different contexts. If you choose the words carefully, they will also suggest to the pupils the theme/s of the play and they will become familiar with recurring motifs in the play. Perhaps the most valuable point this exercise can make is the realisation that the abstract and dramatic concerns of the play *are* revealed in the characters' dialogues, as well as in the action. All too often pupils think these themes are simply the products of some mysterious working of the teacher's mind! Or worse, they go to the cribs to tell them what to think. (Sometimes the language of the cribs is harder to follow than the most abstruse Shakespearean passage, but pupil motivation and belief in cribs overcomes that problem!)

Yet another starting exercise might be to lead pupils into an improvisation of the first act of *King Lear*, translated into a modern situation. If the class is used to role-playing, a number of groups could work out their own improvisation. If the method is new to them, you might have to work with one group, even before you start work on the play in class. You could ask the pupils to improvise a situation where a wealthy and powerful widowed business man decides to make his will. Before he decides upon the terms of the will, he wants to discuss with his three daughters certain conditions he wishes to establish. One condition is that he wants to divide up his time each year between the three daughters, staying with them each in turn. This complicates matters for the daughters—one daughter's husband cannot stand the father, the other's husband likes him but has not the room to garage the father's three large cars, and the third daughter is about to announce her engagement but her future husband has not bargained on having the father to stay so early in their married life. Improvise the family discussion in which the issues are aired.

In the preparation time (which should be considerable) prior to the discussion, the group/s doing the improvisation should spend a large part of their preparation time "getting into role". This means that each person needs to build out the physical, social, economic, psychological, and personal details of the character they are playing. It really requires another article/book to do justice to

this aspect of role-play. John Seely's *In Context* (Oxford University Press) 1976 is very helpful in this respect.

When the group/s have done their improvisation/s you have plenty of scope now for reading and comparing the first act of *King Lear* with the group work. Questions might arise such as, "Is a modern car equal in value/status/necessity to one hundred knights?", "Is making a will the same as handing over a kingdom?". Obviously, the point of the exercise is not just to see *King Lear* in modern terms but to encourage pupils to read the play with a stronger motivation and interest than they might have coming to it raw.

If your class is unfamiliar with even minimal role-play and active drama techniques, it may be better to start by asking them to arrange the physical setting of a scene, placing themselves as characters in appropriate physical proximity to each other, then they read the scene, book in hand. Of course it is much better if this is rehearsed a little, at least, beforehand. Again, by having pupils work in groups, you have a better chance of involving most of the pupils in the class in an activity which should lift the words of the play off the page for them. Isn't this part of the effect we are trying to achieve in the study of drama in the classroom?

The activities and approaches I have mentioned above are intended to lead the pupils to the text, not away from it. As the teacher, I'd feel a responsibility to know when to intervene and draw pupils' attention to the appropriate parts of the text which might solve a problem of, for example, a character's motivation. But I suspect that after a while you may find pupils doing just this themselves. While we are encouraging their responses to literature and valuing them, there are boundaries to the range of valid responses one can justify in terms of the text. When pupils take over your traditional role and start discussing between themselves the validity of an interpretation, you know you have achieved a large measure of success!

Another approach which I think is worth thinking about is that of juxtaposing two speeches of the same character at different stages in the play. Pupils could make their own choices and after some preparation, read the speeches of their choice. I am a great believer in the value of saying the words aloud. Differences in the character's state of mind do become apparent through the words he uses and the rhythms of his language. Records of tapes can be a help here, but not as a substitute to pupils' active engagement through reading the words aloud themselves.

Two speeches of Lear's which deserve placing side by side are his first speech in Act I Sc i. 37-55—"Meantime we shall express our darker purpose . . . Goneril, Our eldest-born, speak first." and his words (I hesitate to call it "a speech") to Cordelia in Act V Sc iii. 8-20—"No, no, no, no! Come let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage . . . That ebb and flow by th'moon."

In the first speech the voice of authority is ponderous and the language is informative. It is difficult to inject much life into the speech. But in the second

speech the verbs, and rhythm, suggest energy and a willingness to partake in life—“sing”, “live”, “pray”, “tell”, “laugh”, “hear”, “talk”, “loses”, “wins”, all suggest an active engagement with the world, and an acceptance of “the mystery of things”. These two speeches, studied closely in context, go a long way towards encompassing the major themes of the play. Changes in Lear’s attitudes and concerns from the beginning of the play to the end are highlighted by juxtaposing these speeches. I’d favour a close analysis of the language—both vocabulary and structure, and several readings of the speeches by pupils, aloud, with attention given to the physical proximity of the characters to each other in the scenes.

It is with some hesitation that I make my next suggested approach to a text because it is easier to demonstrate than to describe in words. It involves pupils in reading a couple of lines of the play in the original, then saying the lines again, this time using their own words to express a meaning close to the original. It works best in groups of about ten readers and I think it is important to establish a couple of important guidelines before the exercise starts: the second reading is a very tentative interpretation of the character’s meaning and no one should feel apologetic for their interpretation; when putting the lines into your own words you must use the first person (i.e. you shouldn’t say “He means here . . .”, but “I want Cordelia to tell me . . .”).

You will find that this exercise is very slow moving and readers *do* give different interpretations to even the simplest sentences. We all bring to each new reading experience our own past experiences and present expectations. What is important is that as a starting point, it allows each reader to make something of the text in his/her own words. Sometimes even people familiar with the play are startled by the new insights they gain into the text when someone else responds to it in this way. As a teacher it is very hard *not* to correct or question a reader who gives a dubious interpretation. But I think it is important to give the readers confidence that they can make some sense of the play. Clarification of difficult lines and a search for an accurate interpretation can come a little later. Quite often readers make their own adjustments as the reading proceeds.

I don’t suggest reading the whole play in this way nor would I do this at the beginning of the study. Lear’s first speech, and Goneril’s, Regan’s and Cordelia’s reply to him lend themselves to this treatment. If you want to demonstrate the insincerity and repetition of Goneril’s and Regan’s protestations of love to Lear, try saying their words in your own words. It is extremely difficult to do because without the rhetoric the words mean little. Try expanding the exchange between Lear and Cordelia—“Nothing my lord.”/“Nothing?”/“Nothing.”/“Nothing will come of nothing; speak again.” Act I Sc i, 89-91. What is each character feeling as she/he speaks? The force of their conflict can be felt if the pupils experiment with expanding the words to express the sub-text, then experiment with saying the original words with varying pitch, pace, pausing and intonation.

Another point which often arises in the course of interpreting Shakespeare’s words, is the aptness of his phrasing and vocabulary, and the importance of the rhythm and poetic images in the lines.

While I have not planned in detail 12-15 lessons on *King Lear* I hope I have made enough suggested approaches to help you make decisions about the kinds of activities which could be considered for your classroom. As I suggested earlier, I think written work should be done at home, after some discussion in class.

An exception to this might be to sit down with pupils in class and answer an examination question with them in a limited time. I think one of the most difficult tasks for the teacher is to decide which parts of the play deserve special attention and which methods of approach will best suit the pupils and fulfil syllabus requirements. It is also difficult to keep an open mind about the kinds of responses which are acceptable. For many pupils a play may seem strange and difficult for a long time. It is for this reason that I think an activity which helps them make a link between their own view of the world, and that of the play, should be given special attention. Ultimately, their view of the world might be expanded as a result of their encounters with the play, but it is impossible to guarantee this.

One of the special advantages of teaching drama is that at its most basic level, it is about people interacting with each other—talking, fighting, loving, hating, tricking, sharing, and so on. It is not hard to find in Shakespeare starting points which can strike a chord with most people. It may mean we have to let Shakespeare be “bastardised” for a while as pupils engage in their own associations with the text. But the time will come when you can and should intervene to draw attention to the text.

Let's demystify Shakespeare for our pupils. If a pupil has done anything more with a drama text than sit and listen to a teacher talking about it, then they will surely be further along the path towards enjoyment and understanding of it.

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Producing and Directing School Theatre

Frank Bladwell

A great deal has been written on drama in schools, and in recent years a wealth of material has become available on creative drama activity in the classroom. The full-scale school theatrical production is written of less frequently, although its incidence in schools seems to be on the increase. I am not speaking of "play nights"—those one-night pot-pourri collections of one-acters presented by every class in the school, often directed by reluctant roll-class teachers. These still occur, of course, but television has so supplanted the traditional one-act play in the modern literary repertoire that those who persevere with play nights have virtually nothing (or nothing new) to produce. In this paper, I am concerned with the school production of a major work: a three-act play, operetta or musical play—an undertaking necessitating some months of preparation.



It should be said at the outset that there is no more personal nor individual an undertaking than the production of a play—particularly if you also elect to direct it. The following suggested course of action is not, then, intended as a *modus operandi* for all intending producers, but as a schedule from which they might select or reject proposals and ideas as they see fit. I should also make a further preliminary point, and distinguish between the functions of the producer and the director, as I shall be using the terms. The producer's function is entrepreneurial. He marshals the physical and creative resources, and appoints all those with specific responsibilities. He may well (but not necessarily) be the same man as the director, who has full responsibility for and control over what happens onstage. If the roles are assumed by two people, a close and harmonious working relationship is essential.

Before you begin to work in school theatre, there are a few basic questions which will present themselves to you. Decisions have to be made about the philosophy underlying what you are about to undertake. The following check-list includes most of the issues I feel need to be decided before you begin to work:

- **WHY ARE YOU DOING THE PLAY?**

Is it because the Principal is insistent? Is it because you are keen? Will there be public performances? If so, how many? How much can you afford to spend? How much can you afford to lose?

- **WHO ELSE IS INTERESTED?**

Assuming at least consent from the Principal, can you count on at least four other teachers for help with specific tasks? Are enough students keen? If they are apathetic, is it total apathy? Why?

- **WHAT FACILITIES EXIST?**

A school auditorium? A workable space within the school? A neighbouring auditorium? How flexible are the staging conditions? How much access do you have to your "theatre"?

- **WHAT THEATRE TRADITIONS EXIST IN THE SCHOOL?**

Isn't it almost always a good idea for a new person to do something different?

- **WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TO OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE?**

Are there people *outside* the school—musicians, painters, carpenters, choreographers, designers—who understand what you are about and are interested in working with you? How do you feel about this very important issue of "outside" help? What is the attitude of others in your school?

- **WHAT PLAY CAN YOU DO?**

Is there a piece, appropriate to the physical and human resources available to you, of which you have a concept—an understanding of how it "could look"? Do you have the facilities to do it properly? Will there be an audience to come to see it?

I've evolved my own ideas on these matters, but different circumstances prevail in every school. I feel strongly, for instance, that if the project is to be worthwhile, there must be sufficient performances for a cast to experience the

feel of a show "growing" in performance: I would consider three or four performances an absolute minimum. It doesn't matter if you play to only sixty people a night. A great deal can be done with the most unpromising locations, but if a reasonably suitable space does not exist in the school, then it is worth travelling to one. My feelings are strong on the controversial matter of "outside" assistance. Many will argue that a school production should be exclusively "school", and as far as the performers onstage are concerned, I am inclined to agree. But working on a play is a *learning* experience for everybody involved, and well-intentioned volunteers from the staff are not necessarily the best people to lead students in building flats, making or finding props, painting scenery, designing costumes or staging dance numbers. The years I have spent working in school theatre have convinced me that many of the most gifted teachers in our community are outside the schools. This kind of work seems to be an ideal opportunity—if contacts can be made—to bring them in, to expose students to their expertise, and to make them feel a part of the school's activities. There is nothing as inspiring nor as contagious as an enthusiastic professional's attitude to a job.

The first and most daunting task is *to choose the piece and to audition*. It seems to me that you can't really do one without the other. The ideal procedure is to choose two or three shows, make yourself very familiar with the peculiar problems of each, and call your auditions. The task, then, is to choose the show in the light of your talent, and your talent in terms of the show. The actual audition sessions are, for everybody, the worst part of the whole process, primarily for the director who must live with any mistakes he might make. You may go into your auditions with some roles almost pre-cast, but try to keep an open mind. Normally, there will be a few revelations. I think it is imperative to give a full audition to every student who comes along. If you have chosen a musical play, your musical director and dance director should also be present. Ideally, each hopeful should see each person involved in casting, so that systematic notes can be made and compared on such tests as ability to read lines meaningfully ("Just try to lift the words from the page"), to project, to carry a tune and to move. Physical data (height, weight, colouring, hair length) should also be noted. It can help to know about a student's previous experience, but this should not be made to seem a prerequisite: beginners can be easily frightened off. It is not hard to isolate those who will be completely impossible, as some will. They will not be total "write-offs", however, and if a student is interested enough to come to your audition, he is likely to do a good job for you in some non-performing function when the show rolls around. (I believe in giving priority for jobs on the crew, as usherettes, etc. to students who tried out unsuccessfully at auditions.) You may audition for three or four afternoons: you cannot really get through more than forty people in two hours, working hard. It is a good idea to have them read for you in small groups of four or five: for most students this is a far less daunting experience than auditioning alone. However, there should be no other audience looking in. This semi-private reading will produce less self-conscious results. Finally, you will want to call back those who have impressed you, confront them with different tasks, and agonize over your final decisions. There is no other way to make them.

As soon as your casting of principals is complete, you can start rehearsals, and the first task is to begin a *production log*. By now, you would do well to have appointed an assistant. My best assistants have been students keenly interested in the project, but not interested in performing in it. The earlier you appoint your assistant, the more valuable he (or she) will be to you in the last stages, as he will have developed a close knowledge of all aspects of the production. In your production log you (or your assistant) should record all details of your casting (and possible stand-bys for principal roles). Phone numbers of key personnel can be very valuable information later. In addition to the log, your assistant will keep the director's script, marking in each move and direction as they are plotted. This script becomes "the bible" as rehearsals proceed, but it is a good idea to mark in pencil: you can always change your mind right up to the last moment.

Having chosen the show, you must negotiate rights. If your choice is Shakespeare, or Gilbert and Sullivan, or Oscar Wilde—no royalties! If you opt for something younger than fifty years, however, you'll have to pay. The author's agent will usually be indicated in the script. The major agents in Australia, from whom (incidentally) lists and descriptions of available shows are also available are:

Samuel French, (mainly for straight plays)
c/- Dominie Pty. Ltd.
Box 33, P.O.,
BROOKVALE, N.S.W. 2100

Chappell & Co., (mainly for musicals) ●
Box 1486, G.P.O.,
SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2001

J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd. (musicals)
Amateur Rights Department,
Her Majesty's Theatre,
Exhibition Street,
MELBOURNE, VIC. 3000

For most recent musicals, it is often necessary to negotiate direct with the agents in New York. I have found Music Theatre International (119 West 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019) extraordinarily helpful and considerate. Another major New York agency is Tams Witmark Music Library, 757 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. For a straight play, you could expect to pay from \$15 to \$25 per performance; for a musical you might pay up to 15% off the top, with a \$200 minimum. If you negotiate with New York, you will also have to cover freight and insurance of script material, which is available only from the agency.

Specialist pages will now be set aside in the production log, as the organisation of the show will take place simultaneous with the rehearsals. On these specialist pages, you (or your assistant) should note all details regarding the following functions and personnel:

- designer
- builders (and volunteers)
- stage manager and crew
- electricians
- wardrobe and hairdressers
- make-up
- properties
- photographs
- business management
- house management
- art work (posters, programme cover, etc.)
- publicity
- programme design and contents
- parking
- public relations (with local suppliers, etc.)
- caterers (Ladies' Auxiliary? Canteen Committee?)
- printers (tickets, programme)

It is a long list, and some of these responsibilities will be doubled, or done by people within your establishment, or 'company'. ('Company' is an invaluable word for making everybody feel part of the undertaking—I think it is a word to be thrown around a lot.) Some elaboration on some of the above: in a major production, you will need four to six people on make-up, and a similar number on wardrobe. A mixture of teachers and students seems ideal, and does a lot more good in the school (residually) than merely getting the show on. For props, you need a table each side of stage, and two very reliable props workers who will hand pre-occupied actors their props on cue, and will make sure that they get them back after they are used. A props check before and after each performance is essential. Your House Manager will probably be an affable member of staff whom the parents know and identify with the school. He will need at least eight usherettes, and may also undertake the preparation of your box plan if his interest is great enough. (This, of course, has to be done early in the piece—before your tickets are printed.) Your parking staff—in boiler-suits or overalls and with torches to save your parents from backing into one another as they park on the basketball courts—can do a great deal to start your audience's evening happily. Finally, people not only need coffee at interval, they are prepared to pay for it!

Tickets will need to go on sale at least three weeks prior to your opening, but the printing of the programme should be delayed as long as possible. Give the printer the details that will not change (summary of the plot, history of the show, list of scenes, numbers, etc.), but keep your personnel lists until he is actually screaming for them. Nothing is so disappointing as to be left out of the programme, even if you have only been swept up in the maelstrom of a show in the last week. And it is really worth the effort to ensure that everybody's name is spelled correctly. All of the above still applies even if you have decided to economise by typing and duplicating your programmes.

You may wish to undertake the building of some (or even all) of your scenery, if only in the interests of involving as many students as possible. A major problem with this is what you do with it after the show. Materials are increasingly expensive, storage can be difficult, and the scenery for one show is rarely readily adaptable for another. If you decide to hire, make sure that you keep a record of every piece which the hirer offers in your preliminary discussion. You will need details of floor plans, height of scenery, etc. Don't be daunted if your scenery looks a bit tatty in the hirer's factory or on delivery to your auditorium. It will probably light out of all recognition, if it has been professionally painted. You may even wish to submit your own designs to your scenery hirer for a quote. Sydney's largest company, specialising in school hire, is:

Prompt Scenery Services,
637 Princes Highway,
TEMPE, N.S.W. 2044

If you do decide to paint your own, my earlier observation about outside help bears real consideration. Scenery painting really is a professional art.

When you order your lighting, ask for the professional help of the hirer. If your school is a hive of theatrical activity, it may be practicable to buy some lamps. If not, it's a rather wasteful expenditure when they are turned off 362 days in the year. (You may be able to limit the number you need to hire by borrowing from a neighbouring school.) Make sure you ask your hirer about:

- spotlights (profile spots and fresnels)
- floodlights
- followspots
- colours
- dimmers (if your hall is not equipped)
- electrical leads
- a communication system (if you light with followspots from the back of the hall)

This is one area in which professional advice and assistance is, for most school producers, essential—and worth whatever it costs.

Costumes can be made by mothers, of course, but if the bills are charged against the show (as they should rightly be, if the same mothers are expected to buy tickets) then it is much cheaper, and normally more satisfactory, to hire. Most theatrical costume hirers will know the show you are attempting, and can make invaluable suggestions which will save you hours. Hiring charges are not excessive—and what happens to a dressing room full of custommade costumes once a show is over?—very few can be used again. What is more, not many mothers have the expertise of professionals. The hirers I have dealt with (Mrs Green of the Abba Dabba Costume Studio, 17 Wollie Avenue, Earlwood, 2206, or Tony Stevens, 40 Leonard Street, Bankstown, 2200) have been more than co-operative, and will rail costumes all over the country, so those in remote areas need not despair. I am really certain, where possible, that to hire is the wisest procedure, and to charge just a little more for the ticket. If the ticket is the only

expense they have, parents won't mind this. Try-ons are important, if at all possible, at least a week before you open. Actors have to *feel* good in their costumes as well as look good in them. Your wardrobe staff really come into their own at this stage, and you must keep a detailed log of *every piece* you receive from the hirer. Wigs, of course, can be almost equally important. (In a boys' school seriously attempting a two-sex play, good wigs can mean the difference between success and failure.) I cannot imagine a more obliging wig-maker anywhere than Elsie Dayne (4 Park Avenue, Neutral Bay, 2089). A description of the character and a hair-line measurement are all that is needed, and the result can be remarkable.

I have concentrated largely on production, and said little about the director's approach to rehearsal. I would not presume to lay down any formulated method for assisting an actor to prepare a role. I know what I do, and I modify it every time I direct a play. However, some general principles might apply. The director (like any coach) must be enthusiastic and, in demeanour, professional. Amateurism is, after all, a state of mind. Make sure that your cast feels your belief in them and in the show. Use (not pretentiously, simply accurately) the professional terminology for flats, legs, borders, cyclorama, tabs, house lights, trucks, travellers, and the striking and flying of scenery. If your company comes to believe in your seriousness of purpose, you will have little trouble with apathy or poor attendance at rehearsals. *You must come to rehearsal prepared.* You must know and announce (on your weekly call sheet on the notice board) what you plan to rehearse, and whom you need. Don't call actors unless you need them, and when they come, work them.

The actual methods of rehearsing the piece will also vary according to the vehicle. It would be pointless to compile a list of specific procedures without reference to a script. I think, though, that the following apply almost universally:

- Talk a lot before you start. Talk with your principals about their characters, their motivations and behaviour. Make sure that you share the same ideas about the characters, the play, and that you are heading in the same direction. (This may well take two weeks of rehearsals before you move a step.)
- Block and move the whole play yourself (roughly) before you begin to rehearse. Then, keep an open mind on any changes which suggest themselves as you begin to move the actors. Make sure that your actors feel that you know what you are asking them to do.
- Be considerate in the number of times you call an actor for rehearsal in any one week. A "lead" might not mind coming four days out of five, but somebody with only two lines might.
- Use as little school time as possible, and preferably none. Work afternoons and evenings (and weekends—if practicable—as the show draws nearer). You will be surprised how readily kids will give up some of their school vacation, as long as they know well in advance. These are almost always the most profitable rehearsals: they are more relaxed, the cast can

work in jeans, and company morale begins to build. Also, you will not antagonise disinterested colleagues: those on the staff who think school theatre is a good thing as long as not one Maths lesson is missed. Don't give anybody bullets to fire back at you and your cast.

- As you work, gently re-inforce the basics that spell the difference between a production in a school and a school play. Urge your actors to project by making them play to you in the middle of the hall. They will do it. (It is important for them to realise that the people in the back row pay as much for their tickets as those who book early.) You need to foster your actors' consciousness of timing, of waiting for laughs without appearing to do so, of stillness, of sitting acceptably and moving economically, and—primarily—of always "building" the other actor, and giving him as much as possible to work off. ("If you do everything you can to make *him* look good, you'll look good!")
- Spend time with your cast, talk with them over coffee breaks, and allow your company the security of feeling that you are in control, and that the final say is (and must be) yours.

It is possible to over-rehearse any play, and three months should be enough to stage almost anything. You must consider matters such as examinations and assessment dates in working out your schedule. I would think that the last ten days' rehearsal schedule would look something like this:

- Rehearse Act I without stops (twice)
- Rehearse Act II without stops (twice)
- Rehearse Act III (if you've chosen a marathon)
- Rehearse the whole show without stops
- Do it again
- Technical Rehearsal (with all lights, scenery, etc.). It is possible to excuse some (even all) of your actors from this ordeal.
- Full Dress Rehearsal (invite 30 or 40 kids from a neighbouring school, patients from a convalescent home, anybody who would not normally buy a ticket anyway. Your actors will need to feel some sort of audience).
- Evening off for everybody (unless you've had disasters)
- Opening Night

Your assistant should sit with you at all rehearsals and all performances and take your notes. These are read to the company at the end of the performance. It is not too hard to find some praise (as well as blame) for almost everybody. These note sessions really can work to make your young actors strive for exactly what you want.

And on the night? If you have chosen your company wisely, the best place for you is right out of the way. Let your stage manager ensure that everybody has arrived; you are better off away in a room somewhere letting everybody backstage get on with his particular job. Don't rush about wishing everybody good luck; you'll only feed their butterflies. Speak to your cast briefly before they go on, but keep your comments to a last-minute full-company pep talk and vote

of confidence. Don't allow visitors backstage *EVER*, and write and give notes on each performance, even if you run a fortnight! And when it is all over, *THANK* people. All of them. You might well need them again next year, and a short, personal message on a card can win you a friend for life.

There's so much more to say. If you are about to dip a toe into the unknown waters I've outlined, don't; plunge right in! If, like me, you have spent some of your happiest teaching hours working in school theatre, you won't need any encouragement from me. Either way, do it properly, and do it with enthusiasm!

This article is a revision of a paper which originally appeared in the Newsletter of The English Teachers' Association of Queensland, and is reprinted by their kind permission.

Creative Teaching Strategies for the Study of Texts

Gordon Beattie

The ideas presented below suggest a number of ways of moving away from the more traditional approaches to texts. These methods are creative drama-based and they are often more memorable and creative for the students, as well as being more fun and stimulating than the traditional methods. The methods described have been applied to drama texts, however, I am sure they can be applied to other texts.

CHARACTER ON TRIAL:

Ways of looking at motivations and incidents within the text concerning one or more characters.

It is assumed that the students have read the text.

The character on trial approach may involve the class working in pairs or as a large group. The basic elements involved are:

1. The character(s) to be examined.
2. Those examining.

There are many structures available to the teacher to get the class into these exercises, depending on the size of group involvement required.

PAIRS

The class is asked to split up into pairs. One member of the pair is asked to assume the role of a character from the text and the other is to assume the role of the examiner (or reporter as in a TV interview). A discussion takes place between the two focusing on aspects of the text. The whole class could be involved simultaneously, the teacher standing out of most of them or perhaps moving about to particular pairs. After a period of time it would be possible for the students to swap roles.

This simple exercise could be a preliminary to larger group work.

SMALL GROUP

Using basically the same approach as described above, with the class being split into groups of four or five. Two students could argue the point of view of one character, or two characters could be examined. The possibilities are endless.

The students might initially improvise the questions and answers, they could then script this into a more formal presentation and present it to other groups.

LARGE GROUP

To involve the whole class a formal trial situation could be set up, with the students assuming different roles from the text and the court. A fun motivation could be set up, it could be a grand inquisition into the life and actions of a character; a royal commission into the incidents of the play; what about a "This is your life?" While fun, to be done properly, the students will have to have more than a superficial understanding of the text. If they don't it will soon become obvious and it is likely that they will be motivated in the situation to grasp a broader understanding.

READER THEATRE

This approach is basically different from the method described above as it involves working directly from the text. The basis of this second approach is, with the text in hand to examine and perform sections of the play as if it were to be performed on stage, hence READER THEATRE. A section, or sections, of a text could be selected and the class split into groups, determined by the parts in the selection and perhaps one extra person as a director (or the moves to be made could be discussed within each group). Moving a play on stage is called "blocking" the play and it is important to remember that every movement in a play must have a purpose and that every speech has some motivation and subtext. To avoid a superficial presentation of the text the students should come to grips with this and should be able to discuss it.

The students are given some time to discuss and rehearse their section of the play and then present it with a discussion after. It is quite an interesting exercise to give the groups in your class the same extract from the text and then give them different motivations for the characters, or the scene as a whole, and then to compare and discuss them after performance.

The motivation aspect of this approach is very important and can give many insights into the text. I have led a number of fascinating workshops where the groups were given a particular speech from a text and then asked to create an abstract sound scape (musical score) of non-verbal vocal sounds which represented what they thought was going on in the mind of the individual at the time. This was particularly effective with a speech from *Macbeth*, although the approach might be a little advanced for the average class.

The READER THEATRE approach can also be used for non-dramatic texts. With a section from the text the students could be asked to develop the non-dramatic text into a script which is then presented.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the above that what I am suggesting are novel or fun ways of stimulating the students into finding new insights into the text by working with it and developing different points of view. It is possible to introduce new characters in the play and examine the incidents from their point of view to give insight to the other characters. It is possible to examine other material which covers the same theme (plays, novels, poetry, music), to create improvisations on themes from the play, or to extend the play back or forward in time. The key to the approach is the question, *will it give insight?*



A high-contrast, black and white photograph. On the right, a man's face is shown in profile, looking towards the left. His features are sharply defined by the high contrast. On the left, a woman's face is partially visible, framed by her hands which are raised to her cheeks. The image has a grainy, high-contrast quality, with deep blacks and bright whites. The number '45' is printed in the lower-left area of the image.

45

Everyman *from* Improvisations to Script

Bob Sidler

Many Senior Secondary students studying theatre history will have some contact with Medieval drama and will probably look at the play *Everyman*. Like Shakespearean plays, this play will present difficulties in understanding, particularly in the language style.

Students who are conversant with the techniques of creative drama and unscripted drama will find their knowledge valuable in coming to grips with understanding *Everyman*.

Basically the play depicts the journey of mankind from birth through to death—the inevitability of death overtaking every man is emphasised, there is no escape, life is transitory. Nevertheless, while nothing can be done to avoid the final outcome many steps can be taken to ensure that one's life, while on earth, has at least been worthwhile, and the play highlights these steps.

The cycle of birth through life to death can be the theme of various short improvised plays which students can work on to help them in an understanding of *Everyman*. Various modes of improvisation can be used such as, straight speech and action, mime, or dance drama.

1. A simple beginning is to have students prepare a quick improvisation of the birth of a child. Point out that what is being looked for is not the usual hackneyed ideas of the expectant father smoking many cigarettes, but that the focus should be on the actual birth of the child. The child forcing its way into a world that will prove hostile as against the soothing environment of its mother's womb.

2. Having done this improvisation it would be easy to read into a further improvisation about the development of this particular individual through babyhood, childhood, youth and adulthood. The emphasis should be on the hardships and possible pleasures that the individual might encounter. Again, we are not looking for the usual clichés that might come easily to mind, but rather for situations both good and bad which would necessitate the individual making decisions which would affect his destiny.

3. A final improvisation could be the death of this same individual with emphasis on his/her peace of mind. This should depend upon decisions made in the second improvisation. For the sake of the task in hand it is fine to oversimplify to the extent that wise decisions in the second improvisation will lead to peace of mind while unwise decisions will not.

Students who have taken part in such improvisations as these should find their work serves as a reasonable introduction to the actual play. They will basically understand the theme of morality that pervades *Everyman*. Though simple, the method can prove quite effective, and by using situations in birth, life and death that the students themselves understand, the underlying allegorical content of *Everyman* should be more readily understood.

(Reprinted by permission from *Drama Notes* (Wattle Park Teachers' Centre) 1977 No. 1)

Listening: First Steps in Developmental Drama

Beatrice K. Morton

When teachers say they've tried developmental (or creative) drama and it flopped, the reason almost always is that they plunged into improvisations with no prior work in drama activities. But along with improvisation and role playing, drama also means such things as movement, mime, and especially sensory awareness. And if developmental drama is to be an important part of any English program, it's important that the teacher begin work in drama with exercises that are non-threatening.

Having students do things individually and in their own seats reduces their self-consciousness. And reducing self-consciousness and replacing it by a growing consciousness of self and of others is one of the significant by-products of the use of developmental drama in the classroom. In addition to avoiding the threatening activities, it is of utmost importance that there be no negative criticism and little if any competition. The purpose is not to discover whether Joe can listen as well as Jane, or whether Joe's group can do a smoother, more effective dramatic improvisation than can Jane's group. What is important is that everyone in the class has the experiences. If there has to be a grade given, let it be for participation alone. Or for the writing that might follow or the degree of understanding of the literature read.

If you move gradually, then, so that you don't threaten students, and if you offer positive comments and avoid competition, you can be quite sure of success. It's taken for granted that you must be honest, respect your students, and engage in the activities for the students' sake (never a do-this-for-me attitude). But you wouldn't be reading this and considering the use of drama unless you were that kind of teacher.

So what do you do if, with the very first listening exercise, someone doesn't hear any sounds? Nothing. Maybe it's a question of impaired hearing, and if so that's a good thing to discover early in the year. More likely it's a question of lack of concentration. Calling attention to the fact is certainly not going to help the student develop better concentration, but almost certainly continued practice with the exercises will help to develop it. And discovering a problem of poor concentration is just as important as discovering any other problem. Then you know what to work toward. And if it's simply an I-don't-want-to-do-it, it's best to ignore this, too, for the time being, until you can meet with the student on an individual and more personal basis. It's not easy to know right away whether the non-participation is a test of you, a rejection of any suggestion for doing *anything*, a feeling of self-consciousness, or some personal problem you know nothing about.

Ignore non-participation, then, as you begin your work in developmental drama. The best place to begin, probably, is doing sensory exercises with the students seated at their desks. These are basic to all of the developmental activities. And for English, perhaps nothing we do in drama is so important as opening the senses. If we look but don't see, hear but don't really listen, can we fully experience any piece of literature? Reading with these senses dulled is like eating an exquisite French dinner while suffering a head cold.

It's well to start with the sense of hearing. Not only can the students engage in numerous activities without leaving their seats, but they can do so with eyes closed. It is difficult to be self-conscious in a classroom if everyone, teacher included, has closed eyes. Work with the other senses will help, of course, to reduce self-consciousness, and exercises that will make students more aware of seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling should be interspersed with listening exercises. For the purpose of this article, however, I have limited the exercises and their uses to English to listening. Following are twelve listening exercises with applications, in most instances, to writing, speaking, language, and literature.

1. Ask your students to close their eyes and listen to the sounds outside of the building. After about thirty seconds, say softly, still with eyes closed, "Now try to block out the sounds outside of the building and listen to sounds inside the building but outside of the room." After another thirty seconds, ask them to block out the sounds both outside of the building and outside of the room and listen to the sounds within their own bodies. "Listen to your breathing. Maybe you can hear your heartbeat."

This, and most sensory awareness exercises, can be followed by *writing*. Even short five minute writings can do wonders in improving writing skills. After

this exercise, for instance, you could ask the students to write about the experience. How they felt as they went through the three steps. Were they able to concentrate on the sounds? Were they selfconscious? A few simple questions can provide an impetus for the writing. The exchange can work equally effectively as a speaking activity, with students in pairs describing their experiences.

If one of your goals as an English teacher is to make students aware of the structure, the function, and the power of language—to help them come to both an understanding and an appreciation of this greatest of tools—you will find that sensory exercises are invaluable in achieving this goal. Most of these exercises can be used effectively for language study. And if you use them for writing and/or speaking, that doesn't preclude their use here. Repeat the exercise at a later date and apply it or at times incorporate the language aspect of the application along with the writing or speaking.

This first exercise can quite obviously be followed by class or small group discussion of the importance of choosing the exact word to express one's meaning. Or students can list words describing the sounds heard. For example, you could ask them to list descriptive words that end in "ing" like *slamming*, *whirring*, *buzzing*, etc. Then in pairs, groups, or the class as a whole, talk about the lists. If you are introducing the concept of the participle, this is excellent, for it allows for inductive teaching. Once the lists are complete you can ask for a few sentences using some of the words. You may get a few gerunds, of course, but you can easily put the emphasis on the words used descriptively. If they discover the effectiveness of the participle—and the word itself need not even be introduced—they will have gained a valuable tool for their writing.

Another application to *language* (and, of course, to *literature*) is the use of the exercise to help students discover the concept of onomatopoeia, again with or without the use of the term. Since some words, at least, came into language because they reflected the sound, the lists can be used also to introduce a study of the origins of language. It's definitely worth the learning for students to realise, for instance, that a baby doesn't say "mama" because of its closeness to the mother, but that the word came into being, with slight variations, in practically all languages. Learning, therefore, that the sound came first and the meaning followed and that the same or similar sounds carrying the same meaning exist throughout the world is achieved with a joyful sense of discovery.

An important application of this and other listening exercises in the area of *literature* is to poetry. After one of my methods classes did this first exercise, a student said, "I was hearing with a poet's ear." What can be more exciting than to have students recognise, early in their work with poetry, the importance of sound? They can also, through listening exercises, get a sense of rhythm—listening for the rhythmic sounds of footsteps in the hall, of a jack hammer on the sidewalk across the street, or the pulse of the traffic stream. Too often poetry is rejected by high school students, partly because the boys have an idea that it's not masculine to like poetry. And the girls often follow the boys' lead. Or poetry is approached as something difficult and divorced from the reality of their lives.

Using sensory exercises can help make all literature a vibrant part of being.

2. Fairly soon after the first exercise (the following day, possibly) go through the same four steps, but add the suggestion that the students try to identify and concentrate on just one sound at each step. For the last step it's well to suggest that they breathe deeply and concentrate on the sound of the breathing. The class can then be asked to *write* about the experience, but only about the sound of their breathing. What did they hear? What can they compare the sound to? The important thing to emphasise might well be a precision of expression, an attempt to find exactly the right words to describe the experience.

As with the first exercise, this can provide a *speaking* experience by having students in pairs or small groups do orally what was suggested above for writing. Or you might ask the class to imagine what the sound would be like if it were amplified many times. Then, starting with a situation (someone out of gas, for example, who goes into a nearby house and hears this loud pounding) have everyone in turn add to the story.

In addition to the *language* activities suggested for the first exercise, which work equally well here, there is a possibility of introducing or reinforcing the learning of the concept of metaphor by asking students to find comparisons that would describe the sound of their breathing. Metaphor, of course, is significant in all of literature, not just poetry. Anything that makes students more conscious of and proficient in the use of metaphor will increase their understanding and appreciation of literature. This second exercise might also be used as a device for introducing a story like Wilbur Daniel Steele's "Footfalls" by asking students to concentrate on the sounds of footsteps in the hall.

3. After beginning with the same pattern return to either the first or second step—listening to sounds outside of the building or inside the building but outside of the room—and ask students to listen again, for instance to one sound outside of the building. "Concentrate on that sound and try to imagine, as you listen, who the person is who is making the sound. Is it a man or woman? What might have happened just before the sound was made? What might happen after? What does the person look like? How old?" Questions such as these will set up a pattern for the imagination to stretch into. The class can, of course, write a description of the person, a short narrative about the person and what had preceded and what followed the sound, or simply free associate to the sound. Another possibility is to stimulate fantasy by asking students to imagine what the sound could be if they were visitors from space hearing it for the first time, or to imagine the sound being made by some fantastic creature. In giving this kind of suggestion, offer it as an alternative to one of the other possibilities for there are often students who are uncomfortable with the writing of fantasy and need to be led gently into it.

Perhaps the best *speaking* activities are either a conversation in pairs with each person taking the role of the person he or she had imagined or, in small groups, pooling imaginings to create a story. Since it is unlikely that two people

would have imagined exactly the same person making the sound, the conversation can be most interesting. It should, however, be kept rather brief or it might easily drag.

An especially good application to literature could be as an introduction to fantasy, following the suggestion above but responding orally so that those who are not able or ready to fantasise in writing can participate or not, as they will. My experience has been that many students have great difficulty reading a story that is not realistic. The reason may simply be that they were not read to as children, or that they did not read books like *Winnie the Pooh* or *Through the Looking Glass* or *The Little Prince* when they were younger. Whatever the reason, though, they often respond with a "that's dumb" or "that doesn't make any sense". But if the barrier can be broken, these are often the very ones who may become excited by fantasy. In a small high school where I taught in Wyoming one group of seniors decided to dramatise *Through the Looking Glass* because one member of the group had just read it and succeeded in getting the other six excited about it. While two other groups wrote original plays and the fourth made an excellent film, this group adapted the story very successfully and, when the film was shown and the plays performed for the community and their peers, the students who were Alice, the Red and White Knights, the Red and White Queens, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, not to mention the football-playing "knights" as talking flowers in the opening scene, received prolonged applause.

4. This time focus on an outside sound and say, "Imagine what it would be like to be the object that is making the sound. Really try to be that object." For instance, if the sound is that of a door being slammed, ask your students how it would feel to be slammed like that. The important point you probably need to make before your students write after this exercise is that they write in the first person. Be the object: "I am a . . ." Even professional writers sometimes fail to get fully into a character if they write in third person.

One speaking activity is simply a discussion of empathy beginning with the original question, "What would it feel like to be slammed?" and moving into a definition and discussion of the value of empathy—even toward objects. I have heard expressions on the importance of empathy from such divergent sources as a potter and an agricultural economist. The potter, Vivika Heino, said that she always tells her students that they will never be real craftsmen until they can empathise with the clay. They have to *feel as the clay feels*, she says. And Rainer Schickele, in the foreword to his *Agrarian Revolution and Economic Progress*, says, after describing how he put himself in the place of everyone connected with agriculture in the developing countries, from tribal chief and peasant to Minister of Agriculture, that "this method of empathy, of experiencing and gaining insight, is not taught in school. But it is an indispensable method for learning to understand people of other nations and cultures. . . . Perhaps this empathic method cannot be taught directly, as mathematics and languages can. But it can be described; its constructive functions can be demonstrated; its development and use can be encouraged."

A specific application to *literature*, following the imagining of how it would feel to be a door slammed, would be as the introduction to the last act of *A Doll's House*. A more general application would be to use this exercise to make the concept of point of view clear—or to reinforce a previous teaching of the concept. Especially the concept that the first person point of view in fiction does not necessarily mean—in fact seldom does mean—that the author and the “I” are synonymous. Students know that they aren’t doors jackhammers and that a reader won’t assume they are just because they write using first person.

5. Again warm up through the early exercises, then have the students concentrate on one sound and relate it to themselves in some way. Perhaps the sound is that of a truck rumbling by. “Imagine you are the truck driver. Where are you going? What is in the truck? What would you be thinking if you were the driver?” Or if the sound is that of a jet, for instance, you might suggest that they are to imagine themselves as passengers, or as captain, or as a stewardess and think about where they would like to be going and why they want to go there.

Like the previous exercise, this offers an opportunity for *writing* empathically in first person. Another possibility is to ask students to write in a stream of consciousness style. If you emphasise the “what would you be thinking” aspect of the exercise, this would be an effective follow-up.

As with so many of the exercises, the *speaking* activities can be oral versions of the writing ones, role playing of the imaginings, or the development of a story. If the latter is done in small groups, there has to be rather quick agreement on whose sounds and whose imagined person or scene will be the basis for the story.

If the previous exercise is followed by a language lesson on the acceptable forms of usage of first person, this exercise could lead into a lesson on pronoun consistency (something we may all foul up occasionally if we’re in a hurry) as well as pronoun agreement.

The *literature* application, as with the previous exercise, could well be the teaching of point of view. In this instance, if students have written in first person as a truck driver, jet pilot, or whatever, ask them to rewrite using the third person. This will do more than almost anything to make clear the differences in effect of the two points of view. This could, of course, be especially good as an introduction to the reading of a first person point of view story such as Anderson’s “I’m a Fool”.

6. This is very much like the previous exercise, except that instead of being persons involved with the sound, have the class imagine themselves to be other people who are hearing the sound. The faint sound of a soprano voice from the vocal music room, for instance, might stimulate one person to be a movie scout listening to auditions. Someone else might imagine himself or herself to be waiting a turn to try out for the lead in the school musical while a third might become a foreign agent who is expecting to get a message in the tonal patterns of the singer. Or if a boy had concentrated on the buzz of the fluorescent lights he

might imagine himself to be hearing this sound coming from the death room of a prison as he awaits execution—or, as a minister or priest, being with the prisoner receiving a final plea of innocence. With the freedom to concentrate on any sound heard outside of the building, in the building but outside of the room, or in the room, there is certain to be a wide variety of responses.

The writing that might follow will be in the first person, once again, but this time the emphasis will be on the imaginative rather than the empathic. And if the short in-class writings that can so well follow any sensory exercise are not graded, the more prosaic of your students might be tempted to let their imaginations fly.

One effective speaking activity is to discuss in the class-as-a-whole the creative process. If one or more students wrote something fresh and imaginative they can, through talking about the process of their creation, help to free the imaginations of others. Of course, they may not be able to find words to express their experience. If so, move on to something else. Another possible activity following this exercise is to construct a story with everyone in class contributing. Begin with a student who has previously exhibited a good imagination and let him or her start the story as the person who was hearing the sound. The important thing here is not to let the story drag out, get bogged down, or turn into an inane situation. This can be done without harm by simply saying "I think we've taken this about as far as we can go."

In connection with the second exercise, a language activity suggested was the teaching—or reinforcing of—the concept of metaphor. Metaphor belongs to language, to literature, and to writing, of course, but if we want students to read and write metaphorically we have to help them discover metaphor as the significant linguistic approach to reality that it is. "How might the person you imagined yourself to be have heard the sound? What can the sound be compared to that is quite different but has something in common—the degree of loudness, the clarity or sharpness of the tone, the quality of the sound, for instance?" Frequent creations of metaphors can get students familiar enough with metaphor to be at ease and to use metaphor in their prose as well as their poetry.

An application to literature can be the use of the exercise for discovering still another aspect of point of view. Although students will have concentrated on different sounds, there will undoubtedly be many who have chosen the same sound, and even all the class might have if one sound were very pronounced. Comparing their writings can help them to discover how differently a picture emerges when it is seen from different viewpoints. The boy who viewed the soprano as a talent scout would see her in quite a different light from the girl who imagined herself to be waiting her turn in the state vocal contest and listening to her main competitor. This aspect of point of view is often neglected but it is certainly as important for readers to know as the various points of view employed by writers in presenting their stories and novels to us.

7. Still concentrating on one sound, everyone is to imagine that the sound is a part of a TV show. "What is happening? Try to picture the scene just as it

would appear on your screen." This imagination-stretching exercise can stimulate writing varying from a simple description of the scene imagined to a more complex piece of writing and even to the development of a short story. The simple description would perhaps be best, especially if the class has not had much experience in this type of writing or preparation for work on that very difficult form, the short story.

Describing the imagined scenes verbally is a valuable speaking activity, especially if done in small groups so that everyone talks. As with the previous exercise, of course, this one lends itself to a round-robin story, beginning with the scene someone has imagined.

A language activity following this exercise could well be a lesson on adjectives. If you had students work on the participle after the first exercise, that could be reinforced as well. Or if it were not done then, it would work effectively following this one. Combining work on the adjective and participle can help students discover the superiority of the latter and may help them to avoid an over-use of adjectives to achieve descriptions. Again, this is not to be done with a traditional grammar drill, workbook exercise approach, but, in groups or class-as-a-whole, with an approach that centers on the use of and experience with language.

A tie with literature that this exercise affords is to description in a story. Appreciation of descriptive passages, such as those in a Conrad story, is something we want our students to acquire. If they try writing—or telling—scenes of their own imagining they can more easily be led into an awareness, at least, of the artistry involved in the sharp rendering of a scene by a master. It might be well to select some short passages of vivid description from several sources, ditto them, and let students respond to them after they have experienced this exercise. This is often more effective than using a story that is being studied.

8. Here is a change of pace. This time you will make the sounds. Ask the class to shut their eyes and listen carefully. "Try to imagine what might be happening. Try to visualise the scene. You're making a movie and these are the sounds in the sequence." Then, holding your fingers together, slap them flat on the desk top. Use just the ends of the fingers at times, the whole hand at other times. Vary the rhythm and the degree of sound. A little practice at home will help. I have found that, if possible, it's better not to try to picture a scene for whenever I have specific images in mind most of the class get the same mental picture. For some reason, that usually is a chase scene in a dark alley even if my mental picture was of a group of outlaws robbing a bank.

Writing can, of course, follow this—either a description of the situation imagined or a simple plot outline or even a plot story. For some reason, though, I have found that speaking is preferable to writing after this particular exercise. Students enjoy sharing their imaginings and especially noting the similarities—there are usually some—and the frequently wide differences.

This could move into a language lesson on the importance of sound. For

instance, you might say something like this: "You've all been able to visualise a scene just from listening to the sounds I made on the desk top. What might have happened if I had said words instead? Are there sounds in our language that bring out a particular feeling? Not words, exactly—they often have emotions attached to their meanings. Just sounds." If no one volunteers immediately, give the hard "g" sound and ask what feeling they get from that. There should be many suggestions.

One excellent *literature* application relates to poetry. Let the students make the discovery by giving them a couple of poems that contain opposite sounds. Something like the Choric song from Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters" with its many sibilants and Robert Hayden's "Those Sunday Mornings" with its harsh sounds that suggest the physical and emotional coldness.

Another possibility is to see that a story can begin almost anywhere—even from a sound. More important, though, would be to use the exercise to help students realise that just as they had different images as a result of listening to the sounds, so they have different responses to all stimuli—including every piece of literature they may read. Sometimes students feel resentful about having to read something that induces a negative reaction. And we teachers all too often forget this truth and expect the same response from everyone. Perhaps if we remembered it—and let our students discuss it—we would be less inclined to have an entire class read the same novel over a two or three week period and would allow for more choice with the reading being done in small groups or individually.

9. This exercise takes place outside of the school. Say something like this: "If you were going to move far away you would want to store up memories of all of the sounds in your house, in your yard, on your street. When you get home after school listen to all of these sounds. Imagine that you are really going to move. Tomorrow we'll do something with them. Store them up."

A *writing* experience the next day follows a listing of all of the sounds each heard. Ask your students to list the sounds in any order, and in a single word or phrase. Next ask them to group their lists under some agreed upon categories such as the various rooms of the house, the garage, the backyard, the street. Using the new lists, students then write descriptions of their neighbourhoods or their homes.

A *speaking* activity, done in small groups, is the sharing of the lists each person had made with a discussion of the effectiveness of the word choices. This, of course, is a *language* activity as well. As such, it could be developed further, either through speaking or writing, by having students (especially in a 7th or 8th grade class) build sentences using the word lists, with the emphasis on combining two or more short sentences into complex ones through subordination. With older students, an effective sentence building exercise would be to use the word lists to build a number of less commonly used sentences (like periodic sentences). For this it is well to supply examples for them to pattern after.

A *literature* application could be aimed at the development of appreciation for setting in stories and poems. If they have gone through the process of careful observation followed by the writing of a description of their homes, students would be more likely to appreciate the effectiveness and importance to the story of a vivid picture of the setting. It would also be possible to see that setting can be the starting point for a story, or, as in the case of London's "To Build a Fire", a dominant element.

In the study of drama, of course, one of the most difficult ideas to convey is the importance of reading a play in such a way that the reader hears the characters speaking—hears the inflections, the tones, the innuendos. Listening exercises—and all of the first nine can work—provide an excellent preparation for the study of dramatic literature.

10. This exercise, in pairs, can be done either seated or standing. It's always fun if the pairing doesn't come out even—then you get to play, too. Ask one person to tell the other what he or she is planning to do on the weekend. (Or what they did at lunch or the evening before or anything that can readily start a conversation.) Allow about a minute and a half, then clap your hands and ask them to reverse roles so that the listener in each pair now tells his or her plans or experiences. After another minute, clap your hands again and ask them to repeat what they heard, beginning with the original listener in each pair.

This and the final two exercises are specifically speaking/listening ones, designed to develop concentration, to learn to block out unwanted sounds in order to concentrate on what their partners are saying, and in the case of the last, to help students become aware of the variations in tone. Therefore no specific applications will be suggested, only some general values after the final exercise.

11. Ask one person in each pair to read silently—preferably a school book—while the partner talks to him or her. After about a minute, have the readers tell the talkers what they read. The first time you try this there will probably be very few who even know what they were reading about, let alone be able to fill in details. But repeat this several times during a period of a couple of months, and you and they will be surprised at the increase in concentration power.

12. This is also done in pairs, but requires open space, so have the desks pushed against the walls. Ask everyone to stand up and separate the partners. Have them stand about three to four feet apart with one person of another pair standing between them, like this:

The pairs are to converse as loudly as possible. You may suggest a topic and, of course, if your building has thin walls, you may have to start with normal volume. At your signal—a hand clap, perhaps—they continue but in a whisper, as soft a whisper as possible. They may find that it's almost as difficult to hear—and to concentrate on what their partners are saying—during the whispering as during the shouting.

Being given the generally rare privilege of shouting in the classroom must

explain the popularity of this last exercise. Besides letting off steam, though, it does give students practice in developing concentration as well as helping them to become conscious of the significance of tone. All three of the last exercises as well as most of the first nine can be used to increase students' listening powers. For years listening has been included as one of the four language arts, but although students are expected to do a lot of listening—especially to teacher talk—they are seldom given any help in becoming skilful listeners. These exercises, particularly the last three, can be valuable in this regard.

Even if the listening exercises, like the last three, are not used for any of the traditional components of English, they are valuable for the development of the student and indirectly affect the student's work in English. Many develop concentration, and the importance of this cannot be over-emphasised. Neither can the importance of developing the imagination. And one of the rewards of using developmental drama in your classes is that your own imagination will flower. The suggestions made here are but a beginning. There are hundreds of variations and many other sensory exercises which you will think of. Doing drama with your students will open for you what Sylvia Ashton-Warner calls the creative vent. It can flow surprisingly free if you'll give it a chance. The difficult thing is to begin—and beginning with listening exercises will be the easiest for you and for your students.



Readers' Theatre as a Method of Teaching Literature

Robert M. Post

Dramatic interpretation is a way of studying literature through the oral and physical creation and re-creation of the literary work. One form of interpretation is *readers' theatre*, which, generally speaking, is performance of literature by a group. This can include a group of individual readings—a poetry program, for instance—as well as ensemble reading—the interpretation of a story or a play. Choral or unison reading may also be a part of readers' theatre.

Listening to literature being performed is a valuable way of gaining understanding and appreciation of worthy writers. Through the more active process of *performing* a work (in addition to talking about it), a student gets as close to the piece as he possibly can. Readers' theatre has the advantage of making the performer less self-conscious, since he is only one of a number of performers. The student also gains from the interaction and cooperation that make up a group activity. Since several students may perform one selection, the readers' theatre approach to the study of literature is less time consuming than the solo reading approach. Above all, the assignment of speakers in a multi-voiced work to different readers vividly calls attention to the form and content of the literary work.

Readers' theatre projects are limited in scope only by the time and resources available and by the creativity of those involved. Programs may be very simply staged, with performers standing or sitting and holding scripts or with texts placed on reading stands. (Not only is this style of staging relatively simple and easy to mount, it is also more appropriate for many pieces of literature.) However, presentation of some literature will call for lively physical involvement, including movement as well as physical contact among performers. Methods of staging should always be determined by what is happening within the literature itself. As Joanna Hawkins Maclay has said, "Every piece of blocking, every bit of business, every suggestion to an actor [or reader] will have to be determined by the specific text with which he is working."¹

Special lighting effects, sound effects, settings, properties, and costumes may all be used to bring the literature more strikingly to life. Simple props or an item of costume suggestive of some aspect of character can be effective. The interpreter of Marian in "A Visit of Charity" by Eudora Welty might carry a plant, and the student reading the part of Pepe in John Steinbeck's "Flight" could hold a knife. A flower basket may be used for Eliza Doolittle at the beginning of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* with the basket later being exchanged for a parasol to illustrate the character's transformation from flower girl to lady.

A multi-media approach in which such arts as dance, painting, and music are combined with literature may enhance readers' theatre activities. For instance, students trained in dance might perform to a reading of e. e. cummings' "sweet spring is your." Another selection suited for multi-media presentation is Vachel Lindsay's "General William Booth Enters into Heaven", which calls for musical accompaniment by a bass drum, banjos, flute, and tambourines. The program might utilise the format of a radio or television program, or it could be done with puppets, the students providing voices.

Readers' theatre programs can be presented in the high school English class by class members. Another alternative is for students in one English class to perform for another class. A third possibility is for drama or speech students to prepare programs to be performed for English classes. Readers' theatre productions also make good assembly programs.

Just about any genre of literature may be adapted for presentation. Interesting and worthwhile programs of nonfiction are possible. These can include essays, speeches, newspaper and magazine articles and editorials, travel, biography, autobiography, diaries, and letters. Since most nonfiction works have single speakers, readers' theatre presentations usually consist of a group of individual performers reading individual selections. A program of essays by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison might include Steele's "The Spectator Club" and Addison's "Mr. Spectator", "Sir Roger in Church", and "A Young Lady of Fashion". The latter essay could be performed by two readers, one to interpret the voice of the essayist, the other to read the enclosed letter from Clarinda. A unit in contemporary American oratory might include the following speeches: William Faulkner's "The Nobel Prize Speech", John F. Kennedy's "Inaugural

Address", Malcolm X's "Message to the Grass Roots", and Martin Luther King's "A Christmas Sermon on Peace".

Like nonfiction prose, lyric verse is usually distinguished by a solo voice. Again, different readers can interpret individual selections. Programs of poems appropriate for the particular course, selected by instructor and students from the course anthology and/or outside sources, can be centered around a common subject, motif, or theme. For example, a readers' theatre program built on varying views of death could include some or all the following poems: "Prospice" by Robert Browning, "To an Athlete Dying Young" by A. E. Housman, "Journey of the Magi" by T. S. Eliot, "Elegy for J. F. K. (November 22nd, 1963)" by W. H. Auden, "Strange Meeting" by Wilfred Owen, "Death, Be Not Proud" by John Donne, and "Crossing the Bar" and selections from *In Memoriam* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Particular literary periods, movements, or individual poets can serve as topics for readings. For instance, a program consisting of the blues poems of Langston Hughes could include "Homesick Blues", "Wide River", "Bound No'th Blues", "Po' Boy Blues", and "Night and Mom".

It is sometimes effective to have a group of students interpret a solo speaker in unison. When this is done, the many voices must blend to become one; otherwise, the basic intent of the poem is destroyed. Some lyric poems lend themselves better to multiple voicing than others. As Wallace A. Bacon has written, "... not all lyrics are alike in the degree of their privacy. Keats's 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' is rather unlike a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins which sounds like a hymn in praise of God, and the hymn may actually gain power in a performance by a highly sensitive, thoroughly trained chorus of voices."²

Narrative verse and prose fiction are most exciting works for the readers' theatre approach. They probably benefit more than any other genre from division into their various voices and performance by a group. Care must be taken in group performance of verse narratives that the prosodic elements of the selections are not distorted. Ballads with refrains, such as "The Ballad of the Tea Party" and "The Little Old Sod Shanty", are especially appealing for unison or choral performance. J. N. Hook has suggested that in an interpretation of "Lord Randal", "the girls may read the mother's questions, and the boys Lord Randal's replies."³

Narrator's point of view is one of the most important components made vivid through ensemble interpretation. The simplest assignment of the parts of a story is for one reader to interpret the narrator with other readers being assigned to read the dialogue of each of the characters. This method of division is most effective when the narrator is primarily an objective observer of the action. In Sir Walter Scott's verse narrative, "Lochinvar", one reader might interpret the narration and others could interpret Ellen's father, Lochinvar, and the bridesmaids. Likewise, in Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery", one student might read the narrator's speeches with other students assuming the

parts of Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Delacroix, Mr. Summers, Old Man Warner, and the other characters.

When the narrator is a character, a single reader can handle both the narration and the narrator's dialogue. Or one reader can interpret the narration, while another reads the dialogue of the narrator in such character-narrated stories as "The Secret Sharer" by Joseph Conrad, "Picture for Her Dresser" by Langston Hughes, and "Quality" by John Galsworthy.

Innumerable possibilities exist for adapting the story told by an omniscient or analytic narrator. This kind of story, too, can be divided with one student reading the narration and other readers handling the characters. Two readers might be assigned the narration with one interpreting the more objective portions while the second reads the subjective, omniscient sections. This division works well with a story such as "The Leader of the People" by John Steinbeck, in which some paragraphs of narration are almost completely omniscient, others are almost completely objective observation, and still others are a combination of omniscient narrator and objective observer.

The interpreter of the dialogue of a particular character might read those portions of the narration which reveal that *character's thoughts as well as relevant description*. In the following excerpt from the tea party scene in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Reader #1 interprets the Dormouse, #2 Alice, #3 the March Hare, and #4 the Hatter.

[1] "Once upon a time there were three little sisters," *the Dormouse began in a great hurry* [italics added]; "and their names were Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie; and they lived at the bottom of a well—"

[2] "What did they live on?" *said Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking.*

[1] "They lived on treacle," *said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two.*

[2] "They couldn't have done that, you know," *Alice genius* remarked. "They'd have been ill."

[1] "So they were," *said the Dormouse; "very ill."*

[2] *Alice tried a little to fancy to herself what such an extraordinary way of living would be like, but it puzzled her too much. . . . She went on "But why did they live at the bottom of a well?"*

[3] "Take some more tea," *the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.*

[2] "I've had nothing yet," *Alice replied in an offended tone: "so I can't take more."*

[4] "You mean you can't take less," *said the Hatter: "It's very easy to take more than nothing."*

[2] "Nobody asked your opinion," *said Alice.*

[4] "Who's making personal remarks now?" *the Hatter asked triumphantly.*

[2] *Alice did not quite know what to say to this: so she helped herself to some tea and bread and butter, and then turned to the Dormouse, and repeated her question. "Why did they live at the bottom of a well?"*

[1] *The Dormouse again took a minute or two to think about it, and then said, "It was a treacle well."*

[2] *"There's no such thing!" Alice was beginning very angrily,*

[3 and 4] *but the Hatter and the March Hare went "Sh! Sh!"*

[1] *and the Dormouse sulkily remarked, "If you can't be civil, you'd better finish the story for yourself."*

Frequently there is one reader per paragraph, but, as can be seen from the paragraph cited directly above, all readers, including some speaking in unison, can participate in interpreting certain sections. In stories with multiple characters in which the narrator is omniscient, two sets of readers may be assigned with one handling the thoughts of characters and the second reading the dialogue.

Other components of fiction, in addition to point of view, may be vivified by group interpretation. A writer's blending of description, scene, and summary is made clear when different students or groups of students interpret each of the three parts of the story. An author's use of indirect and direct discourse is underscored when the reader interpreting the dialogue of a character also handles the indirect discourse of that character.

Drama, since it is written to be performed and since it is already divided into parts, is usually the easiest literary form to translate into the medium of readers theatre. The obvious assignment of a different reader to each of the roles can be varied in some plays to point up aspects of character and character interrelationships. One reader, for instance, may be assigned to interpret more than one character when it is advantageous to emphasize similarities between or among such characters. In a reading of *Romeo and Juliet* one interpreter could take the parts of Capulet and Montague and another the parts of Lady Capulet and Lady Montague to show the likenesses between the two sets of parents and their common effect upon their children. One reader could also interpret both Mercutio and Tybalt to demonstrate the similar effects of hate upon them.

Another variation of the usual one reader-one character assignment is to ask more than one reader to interpret the lines of a single character. This places emphasis upon the varying aspects of a multi-faceted character. Division of the role of Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* graphically points up his emergence as a tragic hero when one reader interprets him as the unfeeling ruler in the first part of the play with a second reader interpreting him as repentant husband, father, and uncle at the conclusion of the drama. Likewise, two students can interpret the character of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. One might read the speeches in which he is "mad north-north-west," and the other perform the speeches "When the wind is southerly" and he knows "a hawk from a handsaw." For instance, the latter reader interprets the soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," in Act III, Scene 1, and the other interpreter reads Hamlet's lines with Ophelia which immediately follow.

Naturally, the more experience high school English instructors have in oral interpretation, the more comfortable they will feel in utilising readers' theatre as a method of teaching literature. But they should not fear experimenting with the approach even if it is relatively new to them. Help is available from colleagues in speech and drama as well as from textbooks in the field.⁴

It is important that student performances be as carefully prepared as time permits. Hastily put together programs are a waste of time for both the students performing and those listening. While it is true that we are talking about the teaching of literature, and it is the literature which is of primary importance, it is also true that the better the students' oral interpretations become, the more effective the readers' theatre method of teaching literature becomes. Carefully prepared performances will be more effective for all concerned. The student performers will have found another satisfying outlet for expression and creativity.

Readers' theatre presentation is a way of focusing discussion of the literature. Discussion may precede or follow the actual performance. Prior discussion is motivated by choices to be made concerning performance, such as the amount of movement appropriate for the selection and what properties and costumes are suited to each character. Discussion which succeeds the presentation takes advantage of insights gained from the actual vocal and physical embodiment of the text. It is probably best to have discussions both before and after the readers theatre program is performed.

By orally and physically performing a literary work, students come into vital, active contact with the selection. There is an immediacy in this experience which is frequently missing in silent reading or oral paraphrase. Through performance the students are actually participating in the oral tradition of literature. Readers' theatre is an effective and enjoyable way to teach, understand, and appreciate representative works of prose nonfiction, verse, prose fiction, and drama.

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FOOTNOTES

1. *Readers' Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 17.
2. *The Art of Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 403.
3. *The Teaching of High School English*, 3rd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1965), p. 201.
4. Among the textbooks the teacher will find helpful in addition to those by Bacon and Maclay are Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, *Readers' Theatre Handbook* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1967); Charlotte I. Lee, *Oral Interpretation*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971); and Alethea Smith Mattingly and Wilma H. Grimes, *Interpretation: Writer-Reader-Audience*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1970).

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